

BEYOND THE WILL TO POWER: NIETZSCHE AND THE APORIA OF PERFORMANCE

Denis Ushakov

ABSTRACT: This article proposes a performative turn in interpreting Friedrich Nietzsche. It argues that tensions in his thought—between systematicity and fragmentation, critique and creation—are not mere contradictions but symptoms of an aporia inherent in grounding ontology in the will to power. Through immanent critique, the analysis exposes the will to power's logical vulnerabilities: its tautological structure, unfalsifiable status, and conflict between ateleological becoming and expansion. The article traces how these aporias replicate at the epistemological and axiological levels when applied reflexively, generating crises of self-reference in perspectivism and value foundation. The central argument, however, is that this impasse is not failure but catalyst for hermeneutic recalibration. It composes recognition that Nietzsche's philosophy operates as performative act rather than coherent doctrine. His agonistic writing, philosophy as life-creation, and biographical trajectory—culminating in mental collapse—are analyzed not as external illustrations but as the medium enacting philosophical content. Thus, moving beyond the will to power means interpreting Nietzsche's work as a performance staging the aporia it cannot resolve, transforming impasse into distinctive philosophical practice.

KEYWORDS: Friedrich Nietzsche; Will to power; Performative philosophy; Aporia; Self-reference; Immanent critique

INTRODUCTION

Engaging with the intellectual legacy of Friedrich Nietzsche within the landscape of contemporary philosophical discourse constitutes a task marked by a paradoxical synthesis of canonization and permanent scandal. This duality renders his figure a singular "*bursting knot*"¹ of Western thought, wherein the apparent transparency of key concepts—the "will to power," the "Übermensch," "eternal recurrence," and the "death of God"—gives way to their fundamental

¹ (Jaspers, 1997, p.45)
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hermeneutic inexhaustibility and provocative indigestibility. As noted by Martin Heidegger, who undertook the most radical ontologization of the Nietzschean project and a profound destruction of Western metaphysics, Nietzsche emerges as a liminal figure: "*Nietzsche is the last metaphysician of the West... whose thought conceives of the will to power as being in its totality*"². In the Heideggerian interpretation, the Nietzschean "revaluation of all values" *signifies not merely a shift in moral orientation but the ultimate consummation of metaphysics as the "history of the oblivion of Being."*

However, while the Heideggerian reading sought to extract a latent systematicity from Nietzsche's texts, the present study proceeds from a diametrically opposed hypothesis. We argue that the source of the enduring intellectual tension generated by Nietzscheanism is rooted not in a hidden system, but in the fundamental duplicity of his gesture. On one hand, this gesture claims the status of a radical immanent ontology; on the other, it inevitably exposes itself as a grand performative act subordinated to a concealed teleology of cultural therapy. This duality, we contend, is resolved not on the plane of theoretical consistency, but in the space of existential-biographical fulfilment. Here, the philosopher's life—up to its catastrophic finale—becomes the concluding argument of his doctrine, incorporating into the fabric of thought what may be termed a phenomenology of compulsion, manifested in the expanded formula: "What does not kill us makes us stronger; everything else compels us."

Thus, this work aims not for another hermeneutic exegesis but for an immanent critique followed by a synthesis, seeking to trace how the fragility of the ontological foundation (the "will to power") is systematically transformed into the force of performative impact and the logical aporiae of the system into the tragic pathos of a philosophical existence "on the edge." This aligns with a broader "performative turn" in Nietzsche studies, which seeks to understand his philosophy not as doctrine but as a "drama of ideas"³ (Acampora, 2013, p. 4) enacted through text and thinker.

The current state of Nietzsche studies, characterized by the exhaustion of traditional interpretive modes, dictates the relevance of this approach. Historical-philosophical reconstruction (from W. Dilthey to M. Montinari), psychologizing

² (Heidegger, 1979, p.4-5)

³ (Acampora, 2013, p.4)

or poeticizing readings (from L. Klages to G. Deleuze), and ideological critique (from the Frankfurt School to postmodern appropriations)—all these directions, despite their productivity, often overlook a systemic analysis of the internal architecture of Nietzsche's thought, its hidden presuppositions, and, crucially, its teleological thrust. They tend to treat contradictions either because of the aphoristic form or as symptoms of a psychological disposition⁴. In recent decades, however, Nietzsche scholarship has witnessed a turn toward uncovering hidden structures and "implicit systematicity," sparking significant debate⁵.

The novelty of this research lies in the consistent application of immanent critique, moving from the ontological core (the "will to power") to its strategic functions and, finally, to the aporiae of self-reference. Subsequently, these aporiae are "translated" into a different plane: the plane of philosophy as *Lebensgestaltung* (life-creation) and performance. We address a question formulated by Arthur Danto, yet push it to its logical limit: Can a philosophy that declares all truth to be a function of the "will to power" withstand the application of this principle to itself without devolving into a "*self-consuming assertion*"⁶? If not, does this collapse not indicate that the authentic "text" of Nietzsche is not a constellation of theses but a mode of existing within thought—a tragic experiment in the creation of meaning under conditions of ontological void?

The methodological framework of this work comprises a synthesis of immanent critique (identifying internal systemic contradictions), conceptual analysis of key terms, elements of the deconstruction of self-referential structures (in the vein of the later works of P. Ricoeur and J. Derrida), and, finally, a biographico-philosophical interpretation that treats Nietzsche's life path not as an external backdrop, but as an immanent component and the culmination of his philosophical project. This trajectory will ultimately lead us to propose a new conceptual figure—the *philadox*—to capture Nietzsche's unique mode of performative philosophizing.

⁴ (Klages, 1926), (Danto, 2005, p.15)

⁵ (Richardson, 1996, p.8-10), (Clark & Dudrick, 2012, p.3-5)

⁶ (Danto, 2005, p.72-73)

BETWEEN THE ONTOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE AND THE SPECULATIVE ANTHROPOMORPHIC PROJECTION OF THE "WILL TO POWER"

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical project, proclaiming itself a "great liberation" from the shackles of Platonism and Christian morality, necessitated the construction of a new, immanent foundation—an ontology capable not only of describing the world in its "becoming" but also of grounding a new scale of values arising from the very essence of being. The "will to power" is "*the last and most intimate essence of all being*"⁷. However, upon the first systematic conceptual analysis, this principle reveals a series of fundamental aporiae and methodological flaws that call into question its capacity to function as a consistent ontology, while simultaneously exposing its strategic nature as an instrument of total reduction.

Central to Nietzsche's ontological intuitions is the assertion of the world as a "chaos of becoming," devoid of a pre-established teleia, divine providence, or a rational cosmos. "*The world,*" he proclaims in his posthumous fragments, "*is a monster of energy, without beginning, without end... a Dionysian world of eternal self-creation, of eternal self-destruction*"⁸. Yet, the principle he introduces to explain the dynamics of this chaos—the "*will to power,*" defined "*not as preservation, but as appropriation, mastery, growth*"—immediately implicates a rigid, universal orientation within this ateleological flow. Every "quantum" of force and "constellation" of will seeks not just existence but also growth, power, and the defeat of internal and external resistance.

This process gives rise to a logically irresolvable contradiction, noted by early critics such as Georg Simmel⁹: how can an absolutely chaotic "becoming," void of goal or meaning, be subject to such a uniform and all-encompassing law—the law of the eternal striving for the growth of power? If the "will to power" is an immanent and irreducible attribute of any becoming, it functions as a universal and necessary law—a "metaphysics of force," which, in Karl Löwith's phrasing ("man is will from the moment God no longer tells him what he 'ought'"), replaces the old teleological determinism with a voluntaristic and essentially equally

⁷ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.550)

⁸ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.549)

⁹ (Simmel, 1907, p.187)

totalitarian determinism¹⁰. This aporia between "chaos and law" remains a central critique, as it posits "a principle of explanation that is itself in need of explanation"¹¹. The persistence of this aporia has led a significant strand of recent scholarship to abandon the attempt to read the "will to power" primarily as a descriptive ontology¹².

As Katsafanas argues, the will to power is best understood not as a metaphysical claim but as a "drive that is constitutive of human agency", thereby shifting the debate from ontology to ethics and philosophy of action.¹³ While this move salvages the concept from the charge of logical incoherence at the ontological level, it tacitly concedes the failure of the "will to power" to serve as the foundation for a pure immanent metaphysics, relocating its function to the domain of ethics and philosophy of action.

Thus, while Nietzsche uses the rhetoric of chaos and pluralism to demolish "old idols"—the moral cosmos, divine order, and rational necessity—he immediately erects in their place a new, even more impersonal and demanding idol: the order of eternal, aimless, yet relentless competitive expansion. Chaos is thus transformed into a logical nonsense—an ordered field of infinite warfare—which represents a regression into metaphysical thinking at the very heart of an anti-metaphysical project.

The heuristic value and rigor of any explanatory principle are tested, according to the basic canons of theoretical discourse, by its capacity for discrimination and, ideally, falsification. However, the concept of the "will to power" fails catastrophically in this regard. Its totalizing character, claiming universal explanatory power, results in semantic vacuity and logical inconsistency. It turns into an impenetrable hermeneutic circle from which there is no immanent exit, since any conceivable phenomenon—any psychological or physical act—can be, and indeed is, interpreted by Nietzsche with exhaustive consistency as a direct or indirect manifestation of the will to power. While this resolves the problem of pointing out the diversity of phenomena, it simultaneously strips the explanation of any concrete content. Every biological and organic

¹⁰ (Löwith, 1964, p.187)

¹¹ (Richardson, 1996, p.21)

¹² (Poellner, 1995, p.85-90), (Gemes & May, 2009, p.45-50)

¹³ (Katsafanas, 2013, p.106)

process is reduced to this "will to power in miniature"¹⁴.

Since every phenomenon can be subsumed under this definition, the concept becomes tautological. As Arthur Danto observed, "*Nietzsche believed in manifestations of the will as the only active things in the universe, much like Bishop Berkeley believed spirits were the only active things*"¹⁵. Such an interpretation renders the theory unfalsifiable in the Popperian sense¹⁶, moving it beyond the scope of rigorous philosophical discourse and into the realm of pure mythopoetics or "*totalizing ideology*"¹⁷.

The most vulnerable point of the ontology of the "will to power" is its epistemological foundation. What is the source of the knowledge that the essence of the world is "will to power"? Nietzsche provides only an implicit answer based on introspection and a grand analogy. By uncovering the "underground struggle" of instincts in the human psyche, he performs a speculative leap, projecting this psychological structure onto the entire universe. This gesture was characterized by Neo-Kantians (Cohen, Natorp) and later by Ernst Cassirer as a revival of animism in the language of secular philosophy¹⁸. Where the prehistoric human endowed the river with a spirit, Nietzsche endows it with a "will to power." Thus, his ontology appears not as the result of demonstrative reasoning but as a giant anthropomorphic projection¹⁹.

Finally, the pluralistic interpretation of the "will to power" leads to a radical deconstruction of the classical subject. For Nietzsche, there is no single World Will, but only countless "centers of force." The "I" is not a substantial datum but a "useful fiction," a byproduct of a temporary domination of forces within the body-psyche. As Nietzsche notes, "*The 'subject' is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum*"²⁰. This thesis, anticipating Lacan's view of the "split subject," where the "I" is merely an alienated imaginary construct²¹, and Foucault's assertion that "the individual is an effect of power," suggests that any subjectification is an act of violence²². The "I" is not a substantial datum but a

¹⁴ (Nietzsche, 1966, p.86)

¹⁵ (Danto, 2005, p.220)

¹⁶ (Popper, 1959, p.40-41)

¹⁷ (Horkheimer, 1947, p.22)

¹⁸ (Cassirer, 1955, p.78)

¹⁹ (Tsendrovsky, 2015, p.50)

²⁰ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.485)

²¹ (Lacan, 2006, p.135-136)

²² (Foucault, 1995, p.30)

"useful fiction," a byproduct of a temporary domination of forces within the body-psyche.

The ideal of the *Übermensch* thus emerges not as a being devoid of internal struggle, but as one who consciously directs this "internal civil war," seeking to subordinate reactive wills to an affirmative will to creativity. However, this struggle does not always end in triumph; where suffering does not "kill" or make one "stronger" in the heroic sense, it simply compels—to adapt, to remain silent, to exist with an irremediable fracture. This phenomenology of compulsion does not refute but humanizes Nietzsche's intuition, pointing to a dimension of experience that remains outside the rhetoric of superhuman overcoming.

THE "WILL TO POWER" AS THE "HAMMER" OF IDOLS

The identified immanent weaknesses of the "will to power" concept as a rigorous ontological model necessarily raise the question of its true function within the architectonics of Nietzschean thought. Why elevate such a precarious, speculative construction to the status of a universal principle of being? The answer that crystallizes in the course of our study is that the "will to power" performs an instrumental and strategic rather than a purely descriptive role, being subordinated to Nietzsche's broader teleological project—a project of a dual, destructive-constructive nature. We contend that it functions first as a universal "hammer" for smashing old idols and subsequently as the only possible "foundation" for erecting a new mythological ideal, thereby enacting what W. Kaufmann aptly termed a "*cultural therapy against decadence*"²³.

Nietzsche likely perceived himself as the diagnostician and accelerator of the profoundest crisis of the European spirit—nihilism, a state in which "*the highest values devalue themselves*"²⁴. The source of this nihilism, he believed, was rooted not in historical accident but in the very nature of these values, which "lie in contradiction to life," born of weakness and fear. The task of the "philosopher-driller," the "philosopher of the future," is to unearth the authentic, often unsightly irrational motives that generated metaphysical, moral, and religious systems. It is here that the principle "everything is will to power" unfolds as a tool of total reduction and genealogical exposure.

²³ (Kaufmann, 1974, p.123)

²⁴ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.142)

Applying this principle with methodical ruthlessness, Nietzsche systematically demystifies the key institutions of Western civilization. Christian religion and morality appear not as divine revelation or the voice of conscience, but as a brilliant psychological weapon in the "slave revolt." This morality, according to Nietzsche, is nothing other than the sophisticated will to power of the weak, aimed at slandering the natural "master" values of the strong (the aristocratic morality of "good and evil"), instilling guilt, and securing subjugation. God, therefore, is not the Creator but a "fiction," a "*projection of impotence*," a figure upon whom the weak project their thirst for revenge and their ideal of justice²⁵.

For Nietzsche, metaphysics and reason—the pursuit of "truth" and the understanding of unchanging laws of existence—are a more sophisticated will to power. This is the will to impose order upon chaos, to create a stable, predictable world-picture that grants a sense of security and the illusion of control. "*What, then, are man's truths?*" he asks. "*They are his irrefutable errors*"²⁶. Consequently, the entire philosophical tradition from Plato to Kant is revealed as a handmaiden not to truth, but to a specific configuration of "intellectual will to power" seeking mastery over the irrational flow of becoming. Even science, with its claim to objectivity and neutrality, does not escape this debunking analysis. The scientific method, causality, and the drive for systematization are all, from a Nietzschean perspective, derivatives of the will to power.

The result of this destructive labor is the total evacuation of semantic space. All former sanctities are reduced to the status of products of a specific "will to power," stripped of any transcendent sanction. The world emerges as a "chaos of becoming forces," void of primordial meaning or goal. This void constitutes completed, radical nihilism—a state Nietzsche simultaneously dreaded and pursued as a necessary, purgative prerequisite for authentic creativity.

However, Nietzsche was not a philosopher of pure negativity, despite accusations of pure destructivism leveled by L. Shestov²⁷. The field of ontological voids cleared by reduction had to be refilled. Here, the "will to power" performs a paradoxical but logically inevitable turn: from a tool of total exposure, it is transformed into the sole positive material and justification for a new life-

²⁵ (Nietzsche, 1967)

²⁶ (Nietzsche, 1974, p.169)

²⁷ (Shestov, 1993, p.45)

affirming myth. As G. Deleuze notes, "*Critique is not a reaction of resentment but the active expression of an active mode of existence: attack but not revenge, the natural aggressiveness of a certain mode of being, the divine wickedness without which perfection cannot be imagined*"²⁸. If the essence of all being, including life itself, is the will to power, then authentic, healthy, and full existence must be the conscious and maximal affirmation of this will. The task of humanity after the "death of God" is not to despair in the face of meaninglessness but to assume the divine function of the creator of values, drawing from one's own overflowing strength. Thus, is born Nietzsche's central mythologem: the *Übermensch*.

The *Übermensch* is not a biological species or a final state, but a principle, a vector, and a prototype. It is a type of being (or a mode of existing) that, according to our synthesis, has accepted the "terrible" truth of the will to power as the basis of the world and of oneself, thereby overcoming "passive nihilism"; has transcended reactive, negative forms of this will (fear, *ressentiment*, herd instinct) in an act of "self-overcoming"; and has directed its will to power primarily toward itself, creating itself as a work of art—a concept resonant with "*techniques of the self*"²⁹—creating new values not out of obedience, fear, or lack, but from the abundance of its own vital force.

Thus, the "will to power" serves as the ontological foundation for a new aesthetics of existence, where the criterion of an action is not its correspondence to an external rule ("moral/immoral"), but the degree to which it enhances the feeling of life, affirms it, and promotes growth and creativity. The supreme test and expression of such affirmation is the idea of the Eternal Recurrence—a thought experiment serving as an existential trial: "Do you want this life, this moment, to recur eternally?" Only those whose lives are lived with maximal intensity and *amor fati* can answer "yes." Here, we return to the dialectic of strength and compulsion: if the heroic *Übermensch* is one whom suffering "makes stronger," the very idea of Eternal Recurrence carries a moment of absolute compulsion—the compulsion to infinitely repeat everything, including frailty and pain, which demands not just strength but a titanic acquiescence to being in its totality.

Taken together, the destructive and constructive phases form a single

²⁸ (Deleuze, 1983, p.3)

²⁹ (Foucault, 1988, p.39)

teleological project whose ultimate, though not always explicitly articulated, goal is cultural-therapeutic: to heal European humanity of the sickness of decadence and nihilism by offering a new, tragic, yet life-affirming perspective. This project can be schematically represented in three steps, following Hegelian dialectics but stripped of its logical pan-logism:

1. Show that old values are based on illusions and the weak's "will to power," and destroy them through reduction (diagnosis and negation).
2. Push nihilism to its logical conclusion, accepting the world as a meaningless chaos of forces, thereby clearing the ground for new construction (catharsis and the acceptance of the void).
3. In this cleared space, using the same "will to power" as the only available building material, erect a new ideal—a being who becomes the source of meaning, a creator, and the "justification of being" through the strength and beauty of its existence (creation and affirmation).

In this light, the ontology of the "will to power" appears not as a neutral description of reality but as a necessary, strategically constructed element of a grand narrative concerning the salvation of life from its own self-negation. It is the philosophical equivalent of a "Gospel" (*Evangelion*) in a religion without God. Its truth is measured not by its correspondence to facts, but by its performative effectiveness in realizing this therapeutic program.

APORIAS OF SELF-REFERENCE

The strategic and teleological nature of the Nietzschean project inexorably leads to a crucial inquiry about its own legitimacy: what is the epistemological and axiological standing of Nietzsche's philosophy, considering its own principles of debunking? Applying the method of reduction to the "will to power"—that is, examining Nietzsche's doctrine through the prism of the doctrine itself—gives rise to a series of profound aporiae (logical impasses). As Karl Jaspers noted, these cast doubt not only on the consistency of the system but also on the very possibility of its existence as a universally valid statement about the world³⁰.

Nietzsche's central epistemological thesis, the cornerstone of his critique of metaphysics, is radical perspectivism. He denies the existence of "facts," asserting

³⁰ (Jaspers, 1997, p.210)

that "there are no facts, only interpretations." All knowledge is conditioned by a specific "perspective"—a perspective rooted in a particular configuration of the "will to power." "*Truth*," he proclaims, "*is a kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. Value for life is the ultimate basis*"³¹. Thus, science, religion, and morality are all "perspectival" systems serving different types of the will to power.

However, once Nietzsche articulates this assertion, it immediately becomes a philosophical analogue of the liar's paradox ("I am lying"): if "every assertion is an interpretation serving someone's will to power," then this very assertion (the thesis of perspectivism) is itself an interpretation; if it is an interpretation, it serves Friedrich Nietzsche's will to power. What are its aims?

If this is the case, the assertion holds no privileged epistemological status compared to other interpretations (such as Platonic theory or Christian dogma). Nietzsche himself anticipates this cyclical trap in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "*Supposing that this also is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection? —well, so much the better*"³². This playful admission suggests that his project does not claim to be a true description of "how things actually stand" regarding cognition, but rather a deliberate provocation within a field of competing perspectives.

Thus, perspectivism, when consistently applied to itself, becomes self-destructive. It either turns out to be just another "perspectival" statement with no binding force over other perspectives (rendering its critique of them unconvincing), or—if it claims universal validity—it contradicts itself by denying the very possibility of universally valid truths.

Nietzsche's ontology, as demonstrated, radically deconstructs the classical concept of the subject. The "I" is not a substantial soul or a transcendental unity of apperception, but a temporary and unstable union of competing wills to power (instincts, affects, and drives). Consciousness often remains oblivious to the underlying struggle that shapes its decisions. Cognition is not passive reflection but an active, aggressive act of interpretation in which the knower's will to power imposes its categories upon the world.

But here a new, equally profound aporia arises: if there is no stable, self-

³¹ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.272)

³² (Nietzsche, 1966, p.22)

identical subject capable of reflexive distance, who is the author and carrier of this philosophy? Who is the "Nietzsche" that discusses the deconstruction of the "I"? This tension is addressed by interpretations that see the Nietzschean self not as a fiction, but as a dynamic, "hierarchical ordering of drives"³³ capable of a form of non-substantial agency and authorship.

The very act of writing texts, constructing complex (albeit aphoristic) arguments, and creating a cohesive mythopoetic narrative presupposes an organizing center—a dominant will that subordinates the chaos of thoughts, affects, and instincts to a single creative design. This contradicts the thesis of the fundamental plurality and conflictuality of the inner world. The theory itself asserts that it is impossible to recognize and describe the mechanism of the "will to power" as a principle operating behind consciousness without a meta-position, or an exit from that very mechanism. The knower is always already rooted in a perspective "sewn" from their wills. Consequently, the doctrine of the "will to power" proves to be not a universal description of ontological structure but a monumental self-description of a unique configuration of the will to power: the psyche of Nietzsche himself. His philosophy is thus, as Freud might say, an "intellectual autobiography" projected onto the screen of the universe. This limits the scope of the doctrine, shifting it from the register of objective ontology to that of a brilliant self-diagnosis and the mythopoetic expression of a specific existential experience—including the experience of that which "compels" rather than makes one stronger.

One of the most acute problems for any Nietzschean "ethics of affirmation" is the transition from description to prescription, known in philosophy as the "naturalistic fallacy" (G.E. Moore). Nietzsche describes the world as a field of amoral struggle between wills to power. He then proposes the ideal of the *Übermensch*, who must consciously affirm this will to power within themselves. But on what grounds? Why does the fact that struggle exists imply that it should be followed? Why are "strength," "excess," and "aristocratism" preferable to "weakness," "lack," and "herd mentality"? Traditional morality grounded its imperatives in transcendent authorities: God, Reason, or Nature (conceived teleologically). Nietzsche destroys these foundations. What remains as a basis for

³³ (Ridley, 2018, p.89)

choosing the superhuman path?

Nietzsche offers what is essentially an aesthetic and vitalistic criterion: strength, excess, creativity, and style are beautiful and tragically majestic, while weakness, *ressentiment*, and herd mentality are ugly, pathetic symptoms of decline. "*It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified*," he wrote as early as *The Birth of Tragedy*³⁴.

However, as Max Weber rightly pointed out, this aesthetic criterion is itself the expression of a specific type of "will to power"—an aristocratic, artistic, affirmative type, which he would call "value-rationality." It cannot be logically or morally proven to one whose will to power has a different configuration (for instance, one who craves peace, security, equality, or justice). Nietzsche can only seduce with the image of the *Übermensch*; he can provoke and challenge, but he cannot logically compel the acceptance of his ideal, for his philosophy has destroyed the ground for universally binding logical compulsions in the sphere of values.

Thus, Nietzsche's project turns out to be not an ethical system in the classical sense, but a grand rhetorical, aesthetic, and existential gesture. It gains force not through the irrefutability of its arguments, but through the intensity, contagiousness, and provocativeness of the proposed mode of life. Its "justification" lies not in logic, but in the power of its performative impact. Even his life path, ending in collapse, can be interpreted as part of this gesture—a demonstration of the impossibility of simply "becoming stronger," pointing toward that dimension of experience that merely compels survival under conditions of irresolvable tension.

NIETZSCHE AS A PERFORMATIVE ACT

The aporias of self-reference leave Nietzschean philosophy in a state of paradoxical suspension: it cannot claim the status of objective truth, its foundations are problematic, and its ethical imperative lacks external sanction. This is the critical impasse identified by readers like Maudemarie Clark, for whom Nietzsche's later work risks self-contradiction³⁵, and by Arthur Danto, who

³⁴ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.52)

³⁵ (Clark, 1990, p.125-130)

questioned whether a philosophy declaring all truth perspectival could itself escape being a "self-consuming artifact"³⁶. However, it is precisely this crisis of legitimation that facilitates a decisive hermeneutic turn. An influential line of interpretation, rather than seeing this contradiction as a defect, has long located Nietzsche's genius precisely in his movement *beyond* traditional philosophical justification. Perhaps the force and enduring significance of Nietzscheanism lie not in its systematic consistency but in a different dimension—in the manner of its enactment. Alexander Nehamas's seminal reading of Nietzsche's life and work as an aesthetic and literary creation has already shifted the criterion from logical truth to persuasive coherence and style³⁷. Peter Sloterdijk radicalized this view, portraying Nietzsche as the "thinker on stage," whose philosophy is fundamentally a performative event, a "scenic materialism" that must be evaluated as an act, not a system³⁸. Building on these insights, our argument seeks to demonstrate that the performative turn is not merely one interpretive option among others but the *necessary consequence* of applying Nietzsche's own immanent critique to its limit: when the doctrine deconstructs its ground, the only "foundation" that remains is the existential performance of the thinker. This reading radicalizes the view of Nietzsche as a "dramatist of thought"³⁹ for whom philosophy's validity is secured through its enactment rather than its propositional content.

This section proposes to view Friedrich Nietzsche not merely as an author of texts, but as a performative philosopher whose life, agonal style of writing, and ultimate intellectual-physiological collapse became an integral part—indeed, the culmination—of his philosophical project. Philosophy here is understood not as detached speculation, but as an existential gesture, a tragic experiment, and a work of art for which the thinker's own existence served as the material. Nietzsche explicitly marks this fact in his late reflections: "*I am one thing; my writings are another matter... Here I shall touch upon the question of their being understood or not understood*"⁴⁰. In this light, the supplemented formula—"What does not kill us makes us stronger; everything else compels us"—acquires the status of more than a psychological

³⁶ (Danto, 2005, p.72)

³⁷ (Nehamas, 1985, p.8)

³⁸ (Sloterdijk, 1989, p.65)

³⁹ (Schrift, 2019, p.12)

⁴⁰ (Nietzsche, 1967, p.259)

observation; it becomes a key to an ontology lived as destiny.

In a performative optic, Nietzsche's central imperative—"Become who you are"—takes on a literal, methodological meaning. This is not an abstract ethical ideal but a principle of philosophical practice. Nietzsche consciously takes himself as the raw material for his work: his catastrophic illness (agonizing migraines, blindness, and gastric disorders), his existential solitude, his lack of recognition by contemporaries, his psychological complexes, and his intellectual obsessions. He does not merely reflect on the "will to power"; he lives it as a personal drama, transforming his biography into a laboratory for testing the limit-states of the spirit. His physical suffering becomes a testing ground for the boundaries of the will; his social isolation is transformed from a trauma into the privilege of distance; his marginality becomes a position of "over-vision" or a "view from the heights"; and his internal conflicts, "demons," and affects are not suppressed but enlisted in the service of thought.

Nietzsche's texts are not treatises in the traditional sense but traces, protocols, and artifacts of the process of self-overcoming. *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Gay Science*, *Zarathustra*, and *Beyond Good and Evil* are not books *about* something; they are acts of the "becoming" of Nietzsche. Philosophy and autobiography are inseparable, and thought and existential practice are intertwined. Even what doesn't "kill" or make one "stronger" in the heroic sense, but merely compels—to endure, to adapt, to exist with pain—becomes part of the raw material from which

The performative character of Nietzsche's philosophy finds direct and intentional expression in his unique style. He consciously rejects the systematic, disciplinary language of academic philosophy in favor of aphorism, poetry, prophecy, and polemical hyperbole—forms that correspond to his ontology of multiple, clashing "centers of force." Nietzsche does not convince through syllogisms; he infects through images, rhythm, and the pathos of despair and exultation. His "truth" lies not in the propositional content of his theses but in the impact of the text—in its capacity to become an event in the life of the perceiver. His stylistic choices are thus "an integral part of his philosophical method"⁴¹, designed to produce physiological and affective effects in the reader, enacting the very will to power he describes.

⁴¹ (Magnus, 1986)

The tragic culmination and, paradoxically, the completion of Nietzsche's performance is his mental illness, which led to nearly total cognitive eclipse during the final eleven years of his life. Within a traditional Cartesian framework, this is a personal catastrophe external to philosophy—a somber biological fact. However, in a performative interpretation, madness acquires a different, sinister, and semantically overloaded meaning: it becomes the final and most potent argument of his system, incorporated into the "Nietzsche myth" (madness as the ultimate trial of an idea, as sacrifice and secular apotheosis, as the impossibility of an answer, and as the plasticity of a legacy).

This analysis concludes that the traditional categories of "philosopher," "poet," or "moralist" cannot adequately understand Friedrich Nietzsche. He is a hybrid, liminal figure operating at the intersection of critique, creation, and enactment. To capture this unique modality, we propose the neologism "*philadox*" (from the Greek "*philos*," love, and "*doxa*," opinion/glory/paradox). A *philadox* is a philosopher whose central performative gesture is the strategic generation and embodiment of paradox, not as a failure of thought, but as its productive engine and final argument. This figure synthesizes roles that are incompatible within the classical philosophical paradigm but coalesce in Nietzsche's practice:

The *philadox* is a philosopher who wields immanent critique as a weapon against metaphysical systems, aligning with the radical skeptical tradition but surpassing it through his genealogical method⁴².

The role of the anatomist and genealogist of culture and the soul exposes the will to power at the root of values, a role that prefigures the "master of suspicion"⁴³, but it aims not just at suspicion, but at a transformative diagnosis.

The role of the mythopoet and creator of new, secular mythologems, such as the *Übermensch* and Eternal Recurrence, is akin to that of a religious prophet or poetic lawgiver, but tailored for a post-theistic era.

The preacher and performer of a new, immanent "religion" of life-affirmation, whose pulpit is the book and whose sermon is a stylized, agonal performance meant to *infect* rather than merely convince⁴⁴.

The artist-existentialist for whom his own biography—its sufferings,

⁴² (Foucault, 1995, p.150)

⁴³ (Ricoeur, 1970, p.32)

⁴⁴ (Nehamas, 1985, p.234), (Sloterdijk, 1989, p.78)

isolations, and catastrophic finale—becomes the primary material, laboratory, and ultimate enactment of his philosophical work, a move that collapses the distinction between *theorist* and *subject* of the theory.

The term "*philadox*" thus serves not merely as a label but as a conceptual tool. It distinguishes Nietzsche's project from systematic philosophy (e.g., Hegel), pure poetry, or moral doctrine. It also differentiates him from later "existentialist" thinkers for whom the biographical, while important, rarely serves as the deliberate, *staged* culmination of the philosophical argument itself. The *philadox* does not resolve paradoxes; he *inhabits* and *amplifies* them, transforming logical aporia into existential performance. His "truth" is verified not by correspondence but by the intensity, risk, and transformative potential of the performance—a standard Nietzsche himself meets, culminating in the indelible image of the thinker consumed by his thought.

His philosophy is, ultimately, a performance of thought under conditions of ontological void. It is not a system of answers but a monumental, tense, and hazardous questioning that became a way of life and led to a life catastrophe. His greatness lies not in correctness or consistency, but in the radicality and intensity of the gesture; not in the resolution of problems, but in their deepening to the very limit where thought itself begins to crack, exposing the underside of experience—that place where what does not kill us no longer makes us stronger in a heroic spirit, but merely compels us to continue existing, bearing within ourselves the unhealable wound of being. Therein lies his tragic truth and enduring relevance.

DISCUSSION

The interpretative framework advanced in this study—positing the performative enactment as the locus of coherence and legitimacy in Nietzsche's philosophy—naturally prompts a series of critical interrogations that serve to delineate its scope and philosophical weight. Engaging with these potential concerns is not a defensive maneuver but a necessary step in clarifying the stakes of a reading that displaces the criteria of evaluation from logical systematicity to existential performance. The most salient challenges concern the risk of biographical reductionism, the problematic status of Nietzsche's madness, and the apparent evasion of discursive accountability.

A primary and recurring concern is that focusing on Nietzsche's life and style as philosophical performance collapses the distinction between the work and the man, reducing philosophy to autobiography. This critique assumes that anchoring meaning in enactment privatizes and psychologizes thought, rendering it a singular, incommunicable symptom rather than a shareable discourse. However, such a view misconstrues the performative turn. The argument is not that Nietzsche's migraines or solitude are the content of his philosophy, but that his philosophical project—in its relentless immanence and destruction of transcendent guarantees—logically necessitated a mode of existence wherein theoretical commitments and lived stance became experimentally inseparable. The figure of the *philodox* emerges precisely to name this hybrid: a thinker for whom the creation of concepts cannot be severed from the risk-laden gesture of their embodiment. The performative dimension, therefore, does not reduce the philosophical to the personal; it expands the domain of the philosophical to include the existential position of the thinker as a constitutive, rather than accidental, element of the thought's meaning and force. Its relevance for the reader lies consequently not in the replication of Nietzsche's specific biography, but in the recognition that engaging with his questions demands a performative response—a personal stance within the void his critique creates.

A more profound and ethically charged objection centers on the terminal point of this enactment: Nietzsche's descent into madness. Framing this collapse as the "final argument" or the culmination of the philosophical performance could potentially aestheticize or intellectually sanction a profound human tragedy, turning a pathological breakdown into a perverse symbol of philosophical honor. This is a serious charge that no responsible interpretation can sidestep. The performative reading, however, does not approve of madness; it sees it as the inevitable and tragic outcome of a project that broke down the basic ideas of a stable, rational self. Nietzsche's own relentless thematization of danger, experiment, and living at the precipice indicates his acute, if not prophetic, awareness of this risk. His madness, from this perspective, is less a romantic fulfillment than the catastrophic index of a limit—the point where the psyche could no longer sustain the ontological and epistemological vertigo induced by its own radical inquiries. It shows the deep impact of the emptiness

his philosophy focused on, the moment when thinking in a completely present way became too much for a person to keep their thoughts organized. Acknowledging the situation is not to celebrate the collapse but to take it with ultimate seriousness. Nietzsche's own insight into the perils of uncompromising philosophical commitment, where the thinker's existence becomes the ultimate terrain of verification.

Finally, a methodological skepticism might assert that the performative turn functions as a sophistic escape clause, allowing the interpreter to evade the rigorous demands of logical consistency and argumentative validation. When confronted with the irresolvable aporias of self-reference, the critique suggests that the analysis retreats from the realm of propositional truth into the more nebulous and less accountable domains of "gesture," "style," or "life." This objection, however, rests on an unexamined premise about what constitutes philosophical legitimacy. The performative reading does not reject logic but follows its trajectory to its limit, discovering there a different economy of philosophical force—one that Nietzsche himself meticulously theorized. Concepts like the "communicability of affect," the physiology of style, and the cultural politics of value creation all point to a model where philosophy's efficacy is measured by its capacity to *act upon* the reader, to reconfigure sensibilities, and to instigate new forms of life. To shift from a paradigm of *validation* ("Is this proposition true?") to one of *performance* ("What does this text *do*?") is not to abandon philosophy but to engage with it on the terms it itself, in its most radical moments, proposes. It is to take seriously Nietzsche's suggestion that the value of a philosophy might be judged by the type of existence it makes possible or impossible. This shift echoes the call to treat Nietzsche's texts as "interventions" that aim to "transform the reader's mode of evaluation" (Owen, 2007, p. 143), prioritizing pragmatic efficacy over systematic coherence.

Confronting these objections ultimately clarifies rather than weakens the performative interpretation. It emerges not as a reductive, romantic, or irrationalist reading, but as a rigorous attempt to think Nietzsche's project through to its final consequence: a philosophy that, in its radical commitment to immanence, necessarily exceeds the form of the treatise and realizes itself—necessarily, tragically, and compellingly—in the existential drama of the thinker. This drama does not replace the text but becomes its ultimate, perilous

commentary.

CONCLUSION

The present study has traced the logic of immanent critique and the subsequent reinterpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy along an ascending trajectory—from the analysis of its ontological core to the disclosure of its performative essence. The proposed methodology reveals Nietzsche's legacy as a dynamic, tragically incomplete act of philosophical existence, where thought, style, and biography inextricably merge.

It has been systematically demonstrated that the concept of the "will to power" as a universal ontological principle suffers from fundamental aporiae: the internal contradiction between ateleological chaos and the implicit law of expansion; its tautological and non-falsifiable nature, which reduces it to the status of a hermeneutic circle; and finally, its speculative anthropomorphic projection, which revives animism within the language of post-romantic philosophy. However, the key finding is that these weaknesses are not accidental flaws. They serve the strategic objectives of a broader teleological project of cultural therapy: the "will to power" functions first as a "hammer" for the total exposure of previous value systems (Christianity, Platonism, science), and subsequently as the only possible "foundation" and building material for the new mythological ideal of the *Übermensch*. Ontology is thus revealed to be subordinated to a concealed pragmatics—the goal of overcoming nihilism through its radical acceptance and subsequent creative transcendence.

Furthermore, the application of these philosophical principles to themselves revealed fatal aporiae of self-reference. First, radical perspectivism, when applied to its premises, seems to undermine the status of Nietzsche's own assertions, reducing them to the level of one among many competing "wills to power." The result is the classic self-referential paradox that has spawned extensive debate, with some scholars, like Steven Hales and Rex Welshon, arguing for a "robust" or "moderate" perspectivism that avoids self-refutation by making claims about the inescapability of perspectives, rather than truth *simpliciter*⁴⁵. Yet, even such defenses struggle to explain how Nietzsche's own genealogical critiques could

⁴⁵ (Hales & Welshon, 2000, p.47)

retain their intended force across different perspectives. Second, the deconstruction of the classical subject calls into question the very possibility of reflexive authorship of that deconstruction—a problem that contemporary Nietzscheans like Paul Katsafanas address by rethinking agency as a dynamic, hierarchical structure of drives⁴⁶. Finally, the destruction of transcendent moral foundations strips the ideal of the *Übermensch* of logical necessity, leaving only the possibility of aesthetic seduction and existential challenge—a move that aligns Nietzsche's project with what Alexander Nehamas termed the creation of the self as a "work of art"⁴⁷, but does not provide a logical compulsion for others to adopt this ideal. Taken together, these aporiae would seemingly doom Nietzsche's philosophy to logical collapse.

However, the culminating synthesis involved a radical reimagining of these aporiae—not as failures, but as indicators of the performative nature of the Nietzschean project. Nietzsche's philosophy was interpreted not as a corpus of propositional truths, but as an existential gesture, a life-creating act (*Lebensgestaltung*), and a tragic experiment in which thought is incarnated into style (aphorism, poetry, provocation) and style into destiny. The figure of the mad Nietzsche was examined not as an external catastrophe but as the final argument and culmination of this experiment, incorporating the collapse of reason into the myth of the thinker-martyr, crucified on the cross of his cognition. In this context, the proposed expanded formula—"What does not kill us makes us stronger; everything else compels us"—attained the depth of an ontological principle describing the dialectic of Nietzschean experience: existing between the heroic ideal of self-overcoming and the tragic reality of indigestible suffering, which is not overcome but merely integrated as a scar, as a silent compulsion to endure.

Thus, the final thesis is as follows: the true content and long-lasting legacy of Nietzsche is not a specific doctrine of the "will to power," but the very mode of philosophizing "on the edge"—the experience of thinking under conditions where guarantees are absent. It is a challenge issued to the human spirit: to create meaning from ontological void while remaining conscious of the inevitable risk of self-destruction. Nietzsche did not provide answers in the traditional sense. He

⁴⁶ (Katsafanas, 2013, p.112)

⁴⁷ (Nehamas 1985, p.8)

demonstrated how terrifying, majestic, and demanding of superhuman courage the intensity of questioning can be in the wake of the "death of God." His final measure of value remained, as he stated, a question of endurance: "*How much truth does a spirit endure, and how much truth does it dare?*"⁴⁸.

To conceptualize this unique mode, we have introduced the figure of the philodox. The philodox is not a systematic philosopher, a poet, or a moralist in isolation, but a performative synthesis of all these roles. He is the thinker for whom logical aporia is not a terminal flaw but the very material of his work; for whom the destruction of traditional foundations necessitates turning his life into a laboratory and, ultimately, into the final argument of his philosophy. Nietzsche, as the consummate paradox, does not resolve the paradox of self-reference; he stages it. His greatness lies in the radical consistency with which he enacted the performative turn demanded by his own immanent critique, transforming the impending logical collapse into a monumental, tragic performance of thought. Thus, the figure of the philodox emerges not as an external classification but as the necessary conceptual yield of the immanent critique applied in this study: it names the type of thinker that becomes visible when logical aporia is traced to its existential-performance culmination.

Nietzsche's performative ontology, therefore, reveals itself as an invitation to the co-creation of being, rather than simply a description of what is—a gesture whose price is known, but to refuse which is to capitulate to the silence of the absurd. Ultimately, as Babette Babich succinctly puts it, Nietzsche's legacy may lie in demonstrating that "*thinking is a kind of doing, and the truest thought is the one most fully lived*"⁴⁹.

Denis Ushakov
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, 1 U-Thong Nok rd, Dusit, 10300,
Bangkok, Thailand
+66814393123
E-mail: denis.se@ssru.ac.th

⁴⁸ (Nietzsche, 1967)

⁴⁹ (Babich, 2019, p.255)

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