

NIETZSCHE AS FORMATIVE THINKER

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ABSTRACT: For much of the twentieth century it was widely assumed that only one sort or type of philosophy was needed. In this paper I argue that different sorts of philosophy may be required against the teleology that insists upon a comprehensive philosophy, and place special emphasis on the importance of formative philosophy. Second, I show Nietzsche to be a thinker of precisely this kind of philosophy whereby metaphilosophical perspectives allow him to develop a distinctly formational *philosophia*. Hence in the first section an account of formative philosophy is given while in the second section a discussion of Nietzsche will illustrate the reasons why Nietzsche is a formative philosopher.

KEYWORDS: Nietzsche; Philosophy

I

According to a widely received view philosophy is a discipline exploring philosophical problems by philosophical methods. Philosophers generate theories or rational accounts justified by arguments. This account occludes the differences between the philosophical architecture a philosopher adopts, their doctrines and their theories. It also assumes without argument a monist thetic. Pluralist metaphilosophy, in contrast, emphasises conflicts between methods and goals and between arguments and conclusions. It asserts that theoretical, practical and formative philosophy are different and may conflict, and that no philosophy can avoid adopting a thetic position towards the world. Context determines what philosophy is for, and the contradictory kinds of philosophy that are needed.

Contemporary metaphilosophy recognises that several types of philosophy are valuable, and that the strong case which may be made for theoretical philosophy may itself imply that not all philosophy needs to be theoretical.¹ Acknowledging the

¹ The claim that theoretical metaphysics is unavoidable is argued on logical grounds by the Oxford logician Timothy Williamson. A case for theoretical metaphysics is also made by the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou. A case for second philosophy has been advanced by the German

constitutive role of intellectual styles and cultural symbolisation does not preclude a quest for truth. Rather it imposes an obligation on us to choose intellectual styles and cultural symbolizations, having regard to their possible effects. It follows that different philosophical frameworks deserve study in the historically specific situations in which they are embodied and deployed under specific arrays of law, institutions, practices, discourses and knowledges. Contemporary metaphilosophy also allows for the possibility that the relationships between different types of philosophy may at times be aporetic. Aporetic approaches to philosophy emphasise what cannot be done, the irreducible conflicts between human needs, desires, interests, values and purposes, and the importance of keeping separate and distinct matters which are essentially different in kind. This implies that gaps and barriers are basic to our experience of the world, and that philosophers characteristically encounter difficulties or antinomies that are irresolvable.

The version of methodological morality which follows implies that it is important to suspect any attempt to sweep such difficulties aside by a comprehensive methodologism or a quest for a single philosophical system. Instead, the art is to move around and between the antinomies, assaying a few, and clearly signposting others without assuming that human beings are unaffected by choices that change the worlds in which we manifest. Aporetic approaches to philosophical organisation imply that doing well in one area of philosophical inquiry may preclude success in another, that developing a good ontology may not go with a good ethics, just as a good epistemology may not go with a good aesthetics. Consistent with this, not all philosophical problems can be resolved by theoretical philosophy, and some philosophy should be practical. Plato arguably exemplified an approach to philosophy of this kind when he claimed that there could be no one unified view of what there is, and that the good must be experienced and cannot be discovered by technical knowing. Such philosophy, however, will need to take account of fields of institutions and diversities of disciplines and transdisciplines allied to them.

In the context of a pluralist metaphilosophy² of this sort *a case can be made* for philosophy which seeks to *facilitate human formation*. Various types of formative

political philosopher Manfred Riedel in *Für eine zweite Philosophie. Vorträge und Abhandlungen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988). For Shestov's earlier treatment of such themes, see L. Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, translated by E. Hewitt (Ohio University Press, 1969), German 1949. Cf R. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999); J.A. Taber, *Transformative Philosophy: A Study of Sankara, Fichte and Heidegger* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1983); and P. Blond (ed.), *Post Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998).

² For the view that a diversity of disciplines with different degrees of certitude are needed see J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (London: The Centenary Press, 1937).

philosophy can be found in Indian, Iranian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean philosophy (Dilworth 1989). In the West, the Greeks were familiar with suggestions that the philosopher lives the life after death while still alive, and with references to the need for philosophers to undergo purification before they perceived the *eide* or participated the *Logos* (Hadot 1995).³ Hadot emphasises for the ancient Greeks philosophy was a way of life involved spiritual experiences and an art of living involving principles or dogmas (*theoremata*). Drawing on Hadot's work does not, however, imply agreement. Hadot modernizes Greek philosophy when he implies that the aim of ancient philosophy was to reshape spiritual compartments and to provide the disciple with a higher mode of intellectual conduct. Nonetheless, Hadot is right to emphasize that the aim of ancient philosophers was that the student should make spiritual progress. He also correctly emphasizes that the student chose a school and hence accepted its dogmas and its way of life. However, the link between philosophy as the practice of spiritual exercises in a *habitus* and philosophy as the making of theoretic claims is more complicated than he suggests.

A formative conception of philosophy was also central to the Roman Stoic conception of philosophy as care of the soul (*anima*), to Augustinian-influenced early medieval thought (Boethius, for example, held that the task of philosophy was to repeat the incarnation) and to the Renaissance philosophy of Ficino who sought to discover the *logos*, first in the soul, and then in the world of the senses (Ficino 1944, 1975). On this view, philosophy requires work on the self. In the twentieth century the notion that philosophy involves work which philosophers must perform on themselves by engaging in thinking of an unusually intense variety was defended by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers.

Philosophy which seeks to facilitate human formation can inherit and refunction resources from different parts of the world, including forms of traditional formative philosophy. In its traditional forms formative philosophy often claimed to be theoretical philosophy, just as it concealed its productive potential in mystifying claims internal to specific cultures and their mythothemes, with the result that the possibility of philosophy which was primarily practical was not adequately explored. Modern formative philosophies have similarly failed to adequately explore the possibility of philosophy that is primarily practical.⁴ Instead, the potential of such philosophy has been either obscured in subjectivism, as if work on the human being was no more than the adoption of a personal path (*darshana*) into introspective worlds, or tied to

³ See P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995) 49.

⁴ Arguably there was already a form of formative philosophy in this sense in Kant. Thus in *The Strife of the Faculties* (1798) Kant insisted that the human being was the primordial creator of all its representations and concepts and ought to be the unique author of all its deeds.

transcendental claims which amounted to no more than an illegitimate admission of faith into philosophy. In contemporary contexts, however, formative philosophy of a practical kind can be developed which incorporates a more profound understanding of *activity*, both in the life of the human being and in the design of practices and institutions.⁵

Philosophy of this type differs from Kantian, Hegelian and Heideggerian practical philosophy in crucial respects.⁶ It is *active philosophy*, in the sense of philosophy that depends on the performance of actions or deeds (*Tathandlungen*). Philosophy for which something needs to be done, a work needs to be performed, a journey has to be made, before the contents to which it relates can be adequately accessed. Philosophy of this type takes up the legacy of Fichte as well as Wittgenstein's insistence on the primacy of actual practices and forms of life. As formative philosophy depends on the performance of deeds, a work needs to be performed but not merely in the Marxian or Paulian sense; and a journey to be made in the manner, for instance, of Buddhist purification, before the contents to which it relates can be adequately accessed. Hence, it differs from philosophy attempting to provide a valid theoretical framework as Wittgenstein well understood, and needs to be evaluated by other criteria. In contemporary contexts formative philosophy of a practical kind can be developed which incorporates a more profound understanding of *activity*, both in the life of the human being and in the design of practices and institutions at a global level. Wittgenstein's insistence on the primacy of actual practice, and not descriptions of it, and the celebrated phrase from Goethe *Im Anfang war die Tat* point to his Fichtean commitment to the primacy of activity, which he understood in the context of his doctrine of the soul. Since Wittgenstein made activity central to the workings of the human world and the operations of our 'forms of life', it enabled him to see that traditional concerns about foundations could be overcome by referring to practices and forms of life as contextual constituents of intelligibility. The task is to transform this insight into productive and formative work on practices and forms of life.

⁵ For the view that a diversity of disciplines with different degrees of certitude are needed see J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (London: The Centenary Press, 1937).

⁶ Practical philosophy was important in the work of the great Islamic philosopher al Farabi. Medieval Jewish philosophers such as Judah Halevi also criticised the idolatry of philosophy conceived in theoretical terms and without regard to revelation. From a Christian point of view Kierkegaard (1813–1855) emphasised the limitations of conceptually oriented philosophy as a form of thought which occluded *Existenz*, while the great Jewish existential thinker Franz Rosenzweig revived both lines of arguments in the twentieth century. For the classic study of Hegel's practical philosophy, see L. Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktische Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes* (Freiburg: Alber, 1978) and A. Gethmann-Seifert and A. Pöggeler (eds) *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie* (Freiburg, München, 1987).

Formative philosophy, what is more, recognises plural rationalities, without endorsing a retreat from technical engagements with mathematics and the sciences. The view that theoretical reason cannot produce what we need in every context has precedents in the early Romantic view that philosophy cannot arrive at a reliable interpretation of how thought or language relate to the world. It is not inconsistent with strong claims for what theoretical reason can achieve within its scope, including the possibility, reinterpreted in biological terms, that reason has content of its own. Similarly, claiming that reason can track the truth is not inconsistent with insisting that some modes of intelligibility cannot be reduced to discursive rationality.⁷ Nor is it necessary to exclude myth from models of rationality. Myth is not secret sense, but related to the social evolution of reason in distorted ways. Nor is reason all that human beings require to guide them in life. Rather in so far as human beings relate to a mythological universe shaped by orientations arising from their existential concerns, there is an enduring need for performative dramatics to provide prescripts for the paths experience may take.⁸ A wider account of reason needs to take account of ritual and drama as enactments which cannot be reduced to their discursive correlates. There are effects which cannot be revealed in narrative, but only acted out in acts of repetition – as Nietzsche adduced regarding the rhythmic pulse of dramatic performance. Since formative philosophy does not assume that reason is neutral or a-historical, the variety of modes of intelligibility and becoming cannot be reduced to a discursive rationality,⁹ to a monochromatic language of being.

⁷ C.f. the arguments discussed in D. Freundlieb and W. Hudson (eds), *Reason and Its Other* (Oxford and Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993). For Schelling on the historicity of reason, see F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For modes of intelligibility, see the works of Michel Serres, especially *Angels: A Modern Myth*, edited by P. Hurd (Paris: Flammarion, 1995); *Hermes—Literature, Science, Philosophy*, edited by J.V. Harari and D.F. Bell (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982); and *The Parasite*, translated by L.R. Schehr (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

⁸ Robert D'Amico in his *Historicism and Epistemology* (1989) examines how different ways of reasoning are embedded in context where those ways can be evaluated internally or retrospectively from the present, but not with a-historical validity (xi, xvi).

⁹ Nietzsche famously held that reason originated in pain and contraction, and was not prior or neutral. Cf. the arguments discussed in D. Freundlieb and W. Hudson (eds), *Reason and Its Other* (Oxford and Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993). For Schelling on the historicity of reason, see F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For modes of intelligibility, see the works of Michel Serres, especially *Angels: A Modern Myth*, edited by P. Hurd (Paris: Flammarion, 1995); *Hermes—Literature, Science, Philosophy*, edited by J.V. Harari and D.F. Bell (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982); and *The Parasite*, translated by L.R. Schehr (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

Finally, as philosophical work designed to bring about change, formative philosophy accepts the need for partiality. Modern Western philosophies exhibit relatively little sense of the degree to which the world we find and experience is shaped by our partialities, despite the work of Gadamer on precisely this question. Yet there is excellent precedent for partiality in ancient Greek philosophy, where it was accepted that it was necessary to choose a philosophy, and that conversion, as well as ongoing pedagogy would be needed if the aspirant were to realise the *mysterium* of the philosophy in his or her life.¹⁰ Many philosophers are hesitant, however, about contexts such as love or friendship in which partiality is central, and disdain the notion that a philosophy can be chosen *because* it is partial to some values rather than to others, even though in most practical contexts the case for partiality is based on claims about how humans actually are, not on relativist or sceptical doctrines which deny the determinacies of the universe. To this degree, philosophy which acknowledges its dependence on partiality has still to receive wide acceptance, even though contemporary pluralism might be thought to favour such philosophy, at least as one possibility among others. Arguably a stronger case for this thesis and the foresaid practices and forms of life, which is linked both to Goethe's vision and Emerson's idea of *über*, is made by Nietzsche the formative philosopher.

II

I now aim to show that Nietzsche can be understood as a formative philosopher because of the following key features of his formational thought. Central is the productive function of perspectival thinking by which he grasps and expounds the main constitutive elements of formative philosophy: a pluralistic metaphilosophy consisting of (1) conflict as a positive force (2) contradictory philosophies being needed (3) aporetic acceptance of gaps and barriers as basic to experience and (4) partiality as a positive element of thinking existence. In the following, I examine two of the central propositions of this kind of philosophy: the primacy of *activity* and, secondly, the *partiality* of perspectives and standpoints (which is not unrelated to its 'conflict' cognate).

1. *Activity*. Nietzsche has a twofold departure point for any account of truth, a position that takes *activity* as the modus operandi for understanding all forms of truth-telling, including the Greek act of philosophizing. First, and throughout all his writings, Nietzsche locates the activity of *willing* – striving to disclose or command – within space and time, within the historicity of becoming. Each act of the will, following both Schelling and Schopenhauer, involves a valency which arises from the specific

¹⁰ Hadot 1995; Martha Nussbaum *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

temporal and contextual milieu responsible for its potency and form. It is never merely 'context' but rather more its *formation* through a conflict of diverse 'ranks of value' and estimations of the good life. It refers to the *will* to truth, as something indicative of the configuration of forces at play (such as 'seeing') in the practice of life, of life-preserving and, moreover, 'life-enhancing' activity. These modes of active participation in the stream of Becoming (*Werden*) echo something of Plato's training within the Heraclitean logic of the play of *logos* under the auspices of the *arche* of Fire. Truth therefore arises from the inherent *agon* of life to determine its meaning: it is an Olympian contest for whose excelling art (*arête*) of telling the truth by so many heroic feats of outdoing, cleverly, one's contenders is integral to a *formative* philosophy. That is, to a world-concept steeped in the battle to know – the 'knower' of *la gaya scienza* – whereby contesting through a regular embodied *gymnasia* of mind and body was itself integral to the formation of the 'higher ones' – the point at which Nietzsche and Plato concur. That is, that philosophizing was transformative both of the body-politic and the individual soul. Nietzsche's appropriation of Greek exercises in active modes of disclosing and enhancing the *cosmos* makes his philosophical stance wholly consistent with the underlying ethos of Romanticism to see nature in the self *transformed*. This is to say, that an extra-temporal (contextual) dimension of how the will to truth unfolds unevenly across the human condition not only exists in Nietzsche's 'Platonism', but moreso, affords him the power to make claims of a discretely *formative* world-outlook.

Our first observation therefore entails a way to the formative philosophy which Nietzsche – following the Greeks and Renaissance high figures – sought to embed firstly via Wagnerian artistry and then an aporetic enlightenment or 'tragic wisdom' within modern decadence. Out of every epochal manifestation of becoming, where Being only appears behind the Veil of Maya, one can find not only willing, truth-saying and conflicts over each of these, but instead a form of *transformational activity* which will traject itself from Past into the Future. Each of these modal activities are both tyrannizing and life-enhancing in the duration of an organism and its constellation of spiritual resources. Hence moderns could not have existed without the forms of contesting the truth and each other's perspective of it that mark the important shifts to moralization (priesthood), tragedy (epic poets), otherworldliness (ascetics' piety), metaphysics (philosophers) and natural determinants (science). These are all elements of formational *partial activity*, in which their claimed contrariness is only a problem for the logician (c.f. *Beyond Good and Evil*). None of these disciplinary or domain-arts of knowing are to be ridiculed or negated, according to Nietzsche, since at the metaphilosophical level they are not antipodes. That would amount (blasphemously) to 'No-saying' pseudo-philosophy; a proper 'Yes-saying' philosophy

affirms each one's domain rights to (what he called) 'the great hunt' of the experimenter (BGE 45)¹¹. As mentioned above, there is an obvious multi-centred approach to the concrete and the real that intentionally pays heed to both limits and capacities.

Beyond diversity for its own sake, Nietzschean becoming assumes that any epistemic move is conditioned by limits; and these limitations or 'partiality' are definitive of the method itself – they give power to that 'perspective' as he calls it, by limiting its specific systemic drive to reduce natural complexity. Hence 'seeing' (in the Heraclitean sense) is a *partial* view onto life; every perspective is limiting because it is a philosophy of the liminal while it normally purports to lay claim to the eternal or the infinite. These are truths for Nietzsche, but they remain partial: one-sided, slanted by interest or preservation instincts, particularistic, effectual, empirical, concrete, and possibly of a herd-kind. In and of themselves these partial philosophies are not evil; indeed, genealogy seeks to rectify their unique status according to the critical eye of the one that shall overcome absolutist ideas and substances. Tragic enlightened wisdom, not dissimilar to that of Plato, accepts the reality of limits and the need for respective domains of activity such as *skepsis*, conferring to each a legitimacy vis-à-vis their power to unveil and intensify the force of life evident in that specific domain of existence. For instance, an appeal to a 'reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon' is given on behalf of the clean intellectual conscience and 'good taste' of judgement (GS 373)¹². Before 'knowledge is possible', however, 'each of these instincts must first have presented its one-sided view of the thing or event; after this comes the fight of these one-sided views' (GS 333). If this were to result in 'an essentially mechanical world' it would only conclude with 'an essentially *meaningless* world' (GS 373).

2. *Partiality*. Having examined Nietzsche's first dimension of formative philosophy it becomes possible to see how the second unfolds from the first: viz, all partial knowledges are not only marked by limit and intensity in their activity, but exhibit the inherent quality of a prejudice. Prejudice being also constitutive of 'bias' is intrinsic to how Nietzsche understood thought processes. By 'prejudice' he means more than limitation, reduction or partiality and something other than epistemic domain specificity. 'On the Prejudices of the Philosophers' in *Beyond Good and Evil* demonstrates the difficulties of assigning *aletheia* to the dictates of logic (including mathematical logic)

¹¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Jenseits v. Gut u. Böse. Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as BGE followed by fragment number.

¹² Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft. The Gay Science*. Translated by W. Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1974. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as GS followed by fragment number.

and mechanical laws. He charges every philosopher with having projected his or her own life preoccupation, underlain by particular valuations, onto the canvass of objective reality. To interpret is to firstly see the world in a peculiar, illusory way that always obtains a specific kind of order from chaos. It is no more than ‘a moral prejudice that truth’, Nietzsche states, ‘is worth more than mere appearance...Let at least this much be admitted: there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances’ (BGE 34). Knowledge is consequently pre-empted by crucial factors that the epistemologist neglects to acknowledge. ‘The harmony past knowing sounds more deeply than the known’, said Heraclitus (47). Knowledge-gathering as an activity is preceded by illusory states that emanate necessarily from the drive to veil chaotic forces by means of interpretive measures, measures which array and arrange discrete phenomena into neat packets (quanta) of substance-soul force. In the pre-established ἁρμονίη (Heraclitus) of the whole¹³, knowledge always follows – it is late to the event of becoming (as βίος). Unlike Kant, transcendental unity does not obtain thanks to the apperception performed by some finite (creatural) faculty – the Oneness is the whole of diverse life-forms of generation and decay. Knowledge, much less than truth, is only one pole of the *tensions* wrought by these diverse strivings for life and growth.

It is therefore a prejudice committed by thinkers to place knowledge or truth-gathering ahead of other (perspectival) modalities of being human – it is a ‘spiritualization’ of the drive to conquer chaos (*physis*) and thereby posits the soul as a metaphysical entity. What this means is that the reification of ‘the soul’ is a natural outgrowth of the ‘will to truth’ as a spiritualized power that teleologically sets upon transforming the earth. As a result of this valuation, a ‘biased’ activity, the promise of the earth is now transmogrified into an epistemic game of solving logical (and thus technical) problems. This is not transformation but instead degradation; an ignoble pursuit that bastardises what truth properly inheres in events that a natural philosopher studies with reverence and joy. If Plato followed Heraclitus’ ἄριστοι by announcing the *Agathon* as the superordinate dimension, then the (true) natural philosopher must know by way of discipline and ἀρετή where the relative place of ἐπιστήμη lies. Yet for Nietzsche the logic of *logos* is not worthy of performing this important work of evaluation, for the work of according ἀχία to things is beyond mere mental labour and requires as well an examination of the ‘social structure composed of many “soul”’ as he called it (BGE 19). Every perspectival-seeing of reality is

¹³ The borrowed Heraclitean whole of *physis*, to be exact, consists of ‘The cosmos works by harmony of tensions, like lyre and bow’ (Heraclitus *Fragments* Camberwell: Penguin Books, 2003, no. 56). Hence balance emerges from productive tensions rather than shear opposites.

simultaneously indicative of our present state of soul and its lineage to past affective impulses which lurk beneath and behind the enobled 'will to truth' put into practice. The ascetic pleasure taken in one's removal from the zone of phenomenal appearing is only one example of how the subject unconsciously wits it to be an important activity for life-enhancing *wissenschaft*. Restraint, distance, coolness, un-selfing, disinterestedness, non-*laissez aller*, and bookishness are all features of the morphology of the soul of the *scholar*. The organs of seeing, of sensing reality and then forging categories to disclose them, are historically conditioned by such states of the soul and yet all quite unbeknown to the scholar; like a priest, s/he no longer has a recollection of her innocence toward the world. While they have *become* 'knowers' the process of becoming such a type (i.e. 'form') eludes them and therefore they can only see the world in terms of Being and not becoming.

This is the most fundamental of prejudices: to take oneself out of the picture when everything shifting around you through moving centre-points makes you also unfixed, transitory and bound to the experience of *Verwandlung* (constant change). It is possible to discern here a very fundamental yet implicit thesis in Nietzsche's thinking: the prejudiced fixation on Being and its substrate of substance-atoms is inextricably bound to the eclipsing of the soul in matters of serious study and contemplation. The natural philosopher-scientist is now more monkish than ever before, and yet is devoid of the care of the soul which the Chartres Cathedral scholars furiously cultivated. Unlike Cusanus or Thierry, post-Newtonian mental labourers never take account of the care of the soul as a feature of their investigations into the natural world. Investigation required a deadening of the soul when all the time it was alive and well and pivotal to the interests and preoccupations of the scientifically minded (ascetics). The soul and its contoured forms in the exegesis of one's interpretation of truth is what ordinarily is omitted from 'serious philosophy' – that habit of doltish mental workers of turning *Lebensphilosophie* into a mere theory of knowledge. In our sense 'serious thinking' is therefore *non-formative* philosophy since the work on the soul through practices, through transformative activity and rhythmic repetition, is denied by English empirical minds. *Lebens* and *praxis* are unnecessarily decoupled by such ('doltish') minds. For us however, they remain inextricably linked as they did for Nietzsche's disciplined, untimely overcoming spirits.

Contra epistemology, Nietzsche set out in his formative philosophy to align philosophies to the states by which we experience and interpret life whether they are healthy (affirmative) or sickly (weakly, nihilistic). Being partial, states inexorably affect our perspective: 'We are not thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed'; in all philosophizing what hitherto was at

stake, argues Nietzsche, ‘was not at all “truth” but something else – let us say, health, future, growth, power, life’ (GS P 2, 3). In other words, Nietzsche is perfectly ‘Greek’ in positing that forms of truth are expressive of states of soul and, importantly, the mingling of soul and *skepsis* forms a movement (dance) that beckons a type of joyfulness. This is the idea of formative philosophy: thinking is formed by the *gemüt* of the thinker’s age and milieu. It is not the intention, goal or purpose that determines; it is the degree of agreeability and being still with all that exists that determines one’s philosophical outlook, one’s disposition. Frogs and mechanisms cannot acquire true happiness – the joy of knowing, especially knowing of the enigma of life, requires a disposition which is at once noble, grand, comprehensive and ripened by the most Baroque perspectivism that art-science can produce.

Here belong Goethe and Plato¹⁴, along with Cusanus, Leibniz and Nietzsche, in the revelry of finding eternal joy within the multiple, infinite perspectives of interpretation – mathematical, optical, chemical, physical, artistic and imaginary. These thinkers all understand that life has become a *problem*, not a biological position akin to that of a frog. What did they each comprehend? In a thoroughly Leibnizian manner Nietzsche described it thus: ‘for in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these’ (GS 374). It is the forementioned positivity of formative thought which upholds the virtue of every partial, limited perspective to exist (at least temporally). Yet something gave the intellect its own force of being, and this the intellect struggles with, grapples with; but with each new natural(istic) perspective, the effect of the intellect increases in modesty as the stature of ‘that something’ which leaps forward and catches ‘the spirit *in the act*’ looms large (GS P2). This something, a ‘wave’ as the famed *conatus* or *vis viva* – a ‘living force’ said Leibniz – is what gives ground to all imaginary force as becoming; and interpretation is itself *formative* of the force at play as much as interpretation is, conversely, shaped by undulations of becoming ‘waves’. Through the liminal one acts while the sea (wave) of formative, becoming forces acts upon us as well.

Finally, we conclude in the vein of a multi-thetic philosophy which the above alludes to and demonstrates that perspectival appropriations of reality – even if in ‘conflict’ – are fundamentally transformative, whether prejudiced or scientific: ‘for in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these’ (GS 374). It becomes evident how every interpretative *activity* involves some kind perspective-seeing, for the grasping of forms presumes so

¹⁴ Note the following oftentimes overlooked distinction drawn by Nietzsche regarding Plato’s thought: ‘All philosophical idealism to date was something like a disease, unless it was, as it was in Plato’s case, the caution of an over-rich and dangerous health...Perhaps we modern are merely not healthy enough *to be in need of* Plato’s idealism?’ (GS 372).

many appearances which Apollonian light unveils and glistens through. The transformative pulse is therefore everywhere according to his formational philosophy, just as the centre is now (moving) everywhere. After the illusion of absolute knowledge is disclosed as a mirror of *homines religiosi*, we can do the proper work of transfiguration: ‘Life – that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame¹⁵ – also everything that wounds us’ (GS P3).

III

To see Nietzschean thought as fundamentally formational is to go beyond the interpretive strictures of both deconstruction and naturalism. Unlike modern commentators on Nietzsche who identify (or impose) largely naturalistic presuppositions¹⁶ upon his life work, our investigation shows the normative, practical dimension to *philosophizing*. Extensions to the self through various ascetic exercises with a practical *and* partial edge to them suggest an outlook, a type of philosophy that differs from ordinary analytic accounts of Nietzsche. The practice of philosophy through arduous strivings over health, existential marginality and intellectual independence gives Nietzsche’s notebooks (and writings) a distinctive *formative* quality. His call to noble existence was not epistemic in kind nor did life’s numerous demands to become equipped in different excelling arts and skills escape his ‘self-overcoming’ imperative. Formation instigates development on the postulate that humans are unfinished creatures and require partiality in order to transvaluate life’s genetic one-sidedness. Nietzsche declared this to be an important truth of his philosophy: all philosophies embody degrees of partiality which their own exponents do not necessarily comprehend as part of their ‘truth’.

A formative reading of Nietzsche furthermore makes sense of the ‘prejudicial’ moment without downgrading it to exegetical discourse. The ‘prejudice of the philosophers’ and metaphysicians by this account captures the *valuation*, the positivity, of all ‘biases’ and how they express perspectival perceptions of reality. Such axiological orientations are found in every philosophy and Nietzsche can be seen to defend a pluralistic thetic at the metaphilosophical level even whilst he seemingly criticizes various biases. The art of philosophizing – its very activity and practice – is conceived as value-creating and as such *skepsis* (thought) must of necessity have a particular

¹⁵ We have to endow our thoughts ‘with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate and catastrophe’ in order to transform into ‘light and flame’ (GS P3).

¹⁶ Brian Leiter *Nietzsche on Morality* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and John Richardson *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). More astutely Maudemarie Clark has recently retracted from an earlier, fully ‘naturalistic’ interpretation of Nietzsche; see (with David Dudrick) *The Soul of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

perspective on life – a partial view of the cosmos. Rather than detracting from speculative philosophy this sort of *formative* philosophy articulates the value which biases play in the educative and cultural extension of the ‘unfinished animal’ that is ‘man’ (sic). On this count, the priest, the scientist, the artist and the philosopher harbour a distinctive (value) preference that gives expression to a perspectival hold on reality that is concretely valuable. As a genealogist of perspectival knowledges, Nietzsche then declares such value creators to be also temporally biased or oriented. That is, that their vouching for x and y is proper according to the formative processes prevalent in their epoch – their *timely* perspective of truth and its practice. Hence Nietzsche in our light stands for a particular positivity which is garnered from seeing ‘thought’ and formation as symbiotic in the affirmation of life (in deed and in word).

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