

Reconsidering the Will to Power in Heidegger's "Nietzsche"¹

Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's thinking has been called the "...most comprehensive, self-enclosed interpretation of Nietzsche yet produced." (Behler 1991: 17) His reading is developed in an extensive number of lectures and publications over the course of more than ten years, most of which are collected in his two-volume *Nietzsche* that was released by Neske in 1961.² Even though Heidegger's many texts that deal with Nietzsche cannot be said to present a unified position³, the main thrust of Heidegger's interpretation is seen by most commentators as involving the reduction of Nietzsche's philosophy to five fundamental and interrelated metaphysical terms:

"Will to power" is the word for the Being of beings as such, the *essentia* of beings. "Nihilism" is the name for the history of the truth of beings thus defined. "Eternal return of the same" means the way in which beings as a whole are, the *existentia* of beings. *Übermensch* describes the type of humanity that is demanded by this whole. "Justice" is the essence of the truth of beings as will to power. (WPK: 189, translation modified)⁴

¹ This paper is drawn from my 2014 doctoral thesis "Heidegger, Nietzsche and the Question of Value" (Radboud University of Nijmegen). My thanks go to the anonymous reviewers of the paper for their insightful comments.

² My references to Nietzsche's works in this paper are from the *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA). The abbreviated title of the work cited is provided in English, followed by the number of the book-part and/or chapter title where necessary. This is followed by the number of the section, the abbreviation KSA, the volume number and then the page number. For the unpublished notes, I use the abbreviation NL, followed by the note number. This is then followed by the abbreviation KSA, the volume number and page number. If the translation from *The Will to Power* is utilised, I also add the abbreviation WP, followed by the note number. The following abbreviations are used for Nietzsche's works: *The Anti-Christ* (AC); *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (BGE); *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT); *Ecce Homo* (EH); *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM); *The Gay Science* (GS); *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (HAH); *Homer's Contest* (HC); *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* (KSA); *Twilight of the Idols* (TI); *The Will to Power* (WP); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (Z). Full details are included in the reference list. Where reference is made to Heidegger's works, the English translation title is abbreviated as indicated below, followed by the page number. This is followed by the abbreviation GA (which refers to volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*), followed by the volume and page number, or if another German publication is utilised, the abbreviation as indicated below is used, followed by the page number. The following abbreviations are used for Heidegger's texts: *Nietzsche* (1936-1946). 2 vols (NI and NII); *Nietzsche: Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art* (WPA); *Nietzsche: Volume 2: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (ERS); *Nietzsche: Volume 3: The Will to Power as Knowledge and Metaphysics* (WPK); *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (GA 7). Full details are included in the reference list.

³ This is argued for by a number of theorists including Michel Haar (1996), who identifies three phases in Heidegger's views on the will to power. Although I do not argue for it here, I contend that Haar's phases can be extended (and so strengthened) by taking into account Heidegger's later claims about the will to power.

⁴ Although I cannot discuss it here, it is notable that in the context of this particular quotation, Heidegger identifies justice as one of the five major motifs in Nietzsche's philosophy. There are, however, other passages

Of these five key terms, it is Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power that has attracted the most significant amount of criticism in the literature. In this paper, I return to a consideration of Heidegger's reading of the will to power, with a specific focus on his opposition of the will to power to becoming (and his view of it as the principle that "permanentises" becoming), showing that his reading cannot be sustained. I then provide support for a "strong" reading of the will to power that does not, in my view, stand in contradiction to Nietzsche's understanding of becoming, but that also does not turn it into an ontotheological principle in the way I assert Heidegger's interpretation does.

1 Heidegger, the Will to Power and Becoming

The focus of my reading of Heidegger's interpretation is his conception of the will to power as the principle that suspends (or to use Heidegger's word, "permanentises") becoming. This is because that conception is, in my estimation, the single most problematic aspect of his interpretation. Heidegger's view is succinctly expressed in his claim that: "... becoming, [...] has the character of action and the activity of willing. But in its essence will is will to power" (WPA: 7; NI: 15). This connection of will to power and becoming is articulated in more detail in *The Will to Power as Knowledge* where Heidegger explains that the will to power means:

[E]mpowering to the excelling of one's own essence. Empowering brings excelling – Becoming – to a stand and to permanence. In the thought of will to power, what is becoming and is moved in the highest and most proper sense - life itself - is to be thought in its permanence. Certainly, Nietzsche wants Becoming and what becomes, as the fundamental character of beings as a whole; but he wants what becomes precisely and before all else as *what remains*, as "being" proper, being in the sense of the Greek thinkers. Nietzsche thinks so decisively as a metaphysician that he also knows this fact about himself. Thus a note that found its final form only in the last year, 1888 (WM 617), begins as follows:

Recapitulation:

To stamp Becoming with the character of Being – that is the supreme *will to power*.
(WPK: 156; NI: 655-6)

where Heidegger calls the revaluation of all values (*Umwertung aller Werthe*) "...another major rubric by which [Nietzsche] assigns his own fundamental position its definite place within the history of Western metaphysics" (N: 6; NII: 35; see also N: 9; NII: 40), and excludes justice as a major motif.

Does Heidegger's contention here, i.e. that Nietzsche intends what *becomes* as "what remains" as an expression of the will to power find any support? Two main problems cast doubt upon such an interpretation: Firstly, Heidegger bases his conclusion (that Nietzsche intends "what becomes" as "what remains" i.e. Being as constant presence) upon a line he extracts from Nietzsche's unpublished notes, a usage that is questionable for two further reasons. The first (relatively minor) problem with the use of this quote is that the title of the sketch is not "Recapitulation" – this title was later added by Peter Gast (Heinrich Köselitz) and was not given by Nietzsche himself (Müller-Lauter 1999a, p. 353). If the use of this illegitimate title is maintained, it could seem as if Nietzsche is providing a restatement of the main tenets of his view on the will to power, and so doing, giving the statement more importance than it might deserve. Secondly, as is pointed out by Krell (Krell in WPK, p. 156n), Heidegger's assertion that the note "found its final form" in 1888 is doubtful. Again, this problem may be considered fairly minor. When taken together, these two difficulties already cast doubt upon whether Heidegger's conclusion is not already too strong. However, the second, and most important main problem that puts Heidegger's interpretation into question is that Heidegger is only able to come to his conclusion by taking the line completely out of its context, and also by ignoring Nietzsche's other statements on becoming and the will to power.⁵ It is this dual difficulty that forms the focus of the rest of this section of the paper.

If we read the line in the context of the entire sketch (NL 7 [54] KSA 12. 312, WP 617) and also in the context of Nietzsche's published statements, a different interpretation emerges. The line directly following the one Heidegger quotes reiterates Nietzsche's contention that the positing of a world of static Being is an error.⁶ Nietzsche here insinuates that we posit a

⁵ It must be noted that Heidegger provides an interpretation of this particular line in a number of other places including NI: 466 and 656; and NII 228, 288 and 339. He also considers the line in the context of *Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?* (See GA 7: 118-9). Admittedly, Heidegger does consider *more* than just the first line of the sketch in various instances, including *Nietzsche's Metaphysics* (WPK: 213; NII: 288), where, in the context of his discussion of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return, Heidegger quotes the first three lines of the sketch. However, the reading I present shows that the way that Heidegger interprets these lines (albeit only the first or the first three) seems to miss the radicality of Nietzsche's point.

⁶ Space does not permit a full discussion of Nietzsche's conception of becoming. In short, my view is that Nietzsche is overtly hostile towards the traditional Western interpretation of reality in terms of *static* Being, and is not positing a simplistic opposition between Being and non-Being, as is often supposed. This is in some ways in line with the view of Manuel Dries (2008, p. 133) who also points out that Nietzsche's concept of becoming is not conceived of as being a mere opposition to Being. In fact, Nietzsche sees the consequences of

world of static Being because our senses deceive us into thinking that the world consists of stable entities. This claim is also present in Nietzsche's published work: in *Dawn*, for example, Nietzsche blames the "habits" of our senses for postulating a static world of Being lying behind or beyond becoming, claiming that "The habits of our senses have woven us into lies and deception of sensation: These again are the basis of all our judgements and 'knowledge' – there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the *real world!*" (D 117; KSA 3. 110).

Yet, Nietzsche goes further in the unpublished sketch since the "falsification" he identifies is here characterised as twofold - our "spirit" also wishes to preserve the idea of a world that is permanently present. Why? To be able to endure life, we avoid confronting the idea that the world is a becoming without an explicit purpose – i.e. that there is no static Being. This point also finds expression in the published works, for example, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes that:

We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live – by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error (GS 121 KSA 3.477-478, emphasis mine).

Already at this point, it seems to me that when Nietzsche claims that the "supreme" will to power is the imposition of the character of Being (stasis and stability) onto the character of Becoming, he means that it is we (as expressions of will to power) who do so because of our all too human psychological needs. In other words, when Nietzsche claims that the supreme will to power is imposing the character of Being upon becoming, this needs to be read in the context of Nietzsche's analysis of our tendency towards and need for stability and security, as well as his rejection of the idea of static Being. By taking the line out of context, Heidegger is able to use it to mean exactly the opposite of what Nietzsche intends, i.e. that Nietzsche intends "what becomes" as "what remains."

remaining caught up in the usual metaphysical opposition as very serious. He says: "The logical world-negation and -nihilization follows from our need to oppose Being to non-Being and that the concept 'becoming' is denied" (NL 9 [62] KSA 12.369, translation mine). See also especially Swift (2008) and Catanu (2010).

My reading is strengthened by a consideration of the rest of the sketch, including specifically the fourth line that reiterates Nietzsche's contention that the world of Being is something that has been invented, and that this invention yields certain values that allow for the rejection of becoming. What this means is that humanity has cultivated itself:

...on the basis of a set of fundamental errors and this has involved the development of certain kinds of sensation and perception in which the changes in things go unperceived and all kinds of influences are not felt" (Ansell-Pearson 2006, p. 239).

It is Nietzsche's challenge to us to ask whether we can "incorporate" this knowledge of the "truth" of the ultimate flux of things.

Nietzsche moves on in the sketch to reject the idea of absolute knowledge (knowledge-in-itself), claiming that in a world of becoming, such knowledge is impossible. He answers the question of how, in the face of such a conception of the world, knowledge is possible, by saying that it is only as a will to power, and specifically as a will to deception, that this could be. He continues by reiterating his rejection of the traditional "subject" and the idea of "cause and effect" that appears in his published works. In *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche rejects the concept of static Being, for example, we also find a clear indication that he also refuses the traditional, mechanistic understanding of the willing subject that "causes" effects:

Everywhere [language] sees a doer and a doing; it believes in will as the cause; it believes in the "ego", in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-substance upon all things—only thereby does it first create the concept of "thing." Everywhere "being" is projected by thought, pushed underneath, as the cause; the concept of "being" follows, and is derivative of, the concept of "ego." In the beginning there is that great calamity of error that the will is something which is *effective*, that will is a capacity. Today we know that it is only a word. [...] I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar... (TI "Reason" 5 KSA 6.77-78).

So, in addition to his rejection of a conception of Being as static and prior to becoming, Nietzsche is here also rejecting the idea of a willing subject who can somehow step outside

the never-ending spiral of becoming, and “cause” events in the world. Will, in that sense, is for Nietzsche, “only a word” we have created.⁷

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains this rejection of the will in the traditional sense in more detail (GS 127 KSA 3.482-483). There we see Nietzsche expressing his rejection of Schopenhauer’s understanding of the will, calling such a view a primitive “mythology.” This rejection appears elsewhere, including in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche calls Schopenhauer’s idea that the “...will alone is really known to us, absolutely and completely known, without deduction or addition,” an exaggeration of a “popular prejudice.” (BGE 19 KSA 5.31-32) Contrary to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche rejects the idea of the will as a “cause” of actions performed by a “personal, willing being,” and posits instead that it is only because certain organisms (“intellektuellen Wesen“) can interpret a stimulus as pleasurable or unpleasant, that these organisms can then *create* the idea of a will. In sum, Nietzsche rejects the idea that there exists a world of singular unities, each driven by a “will,” and so for him, psychology’s idea of the will as an effect-ive capacity does not exist. The will is a mere word we have created.

From the above characterisation, it seems that Heidegger’s assertion that with Nietzsche’s “...nihilistic inversion of the pre-eminence of representation to the pre-eminence of will as the will to power,” the will achieves absolute dominion in the essence of subjectivity (WPK: 224; NI: 300-1), is doubtful, since Nietzsche’s characterisation of the will involves a rejection of human being understood as a “subject” - a willing, atomic unity.

Returning to the unpublished note under discussion, we see that instead of the traditional view of the world as operating according to causal mechanism, Nietzsche posits the mutual struggle of all that becomes.⁸ He claims that the “old” ideals are not useful for interpreting the totality of events because they are, in his view, contradictory to life. He rejects both idealism and mechanistic theory as possible explanations because, in his view, both lead to

⁷ It is not often acknowledged that Heidegger in fact acknowledges that, for Nietzsche, the will is a “fiction.” Despite this acknowledgement, Heidegger does, however, then proceed to develop the idea of will as command, since he posits that “Nietzsche must say in what respect that which is named in the word will is to be thought if the word is not to remain a mere sound.” (WPK: 152; NI: 650)

⁸ This idea – that everything that happens is a struggle - is reiterated by Nietzsche in a number of instances. See for example, NL 1 [92] KSA 12.33.

meaninglessness.⁹ The “new desert” of nihilism caused by the destruction of ideals requires for Nietzsche that we become “amphibians” – able to endure the resultant altered landscape - and he posits that art is a means by which we could do so.¹⁰

So, when read in the context of the entire sketch, it seems that Heidegger’s conclusion, i.e. that Nietzsche intends what *becomes* as “what remains” does not find support, and actually contradicts Nietzsche’s point. Nietzsche’s claim that the “supreme” will to power is the imposition of the character of Being (stasis, stability and so on) onto the character of Becoming, is rather a comment upon how *one* traditional interpretation of reality, which is in fact hostile to life, has dominated over others in the history of philosophy.¹¹ What does this mean for an understanding of the will to power?

2 Another “Strong” Reading

In the context of the quotation discussed, it seems to me that the will to power is the way in which Nietzsche characterises his (non-traditional) understanding of the willing of one specific organism – the interpreting human being - and so provides support for views that posit that the doctrine is merely “psychological” in nature. The problem is that Nietzsche’s characterisation of the will to power is not limited to the psychological. If we, for example, consider just *one* of Nietzsche’s published works – *Beyond Good and Evil* – a plethora of characterisations emerge: the will to power as the will to truth (§ 211); as philosophy (§ 9); as life (§ 13) and as the world (§ 36). As such, further exploration of the concept and its uses in Nietzsche’s works is necessary.

⁹ Nietzsche does not provide reasons for this claim here, but this rejection (and his reasons for it) does appear in a number of instances in the published works. See for example HAH I 490 KSA 2.318; GS 372 KSA 3.623-624 and GM III [19] KSA 5.384-387.

¹⁰ This point is echoed in *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche discusses how art consists in a kind of “cult of the untrue” that allows us to cultivate a “good will to appearance” permitting us to live with the realisation that “delusion and error” are “conditions of human knowledge and sensation” (GS 107.94-95). What is important to note at this point is that Nietzsche does not simplistically proclaim that *all* art and *all* artists can provide the means for enduring the nihilism caused by the destruction of the highest ideals. As he points out in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, artists are also corruptible (see GM III [5] KSA 5.345), and not all art represents the “...overflow of the wise and harmonious manner of life” (HAH I [212] KSA 2. 173).

¹¹ Magnus (1970, p. 33) makes the same point, reading Nietzsche’s claim that the supreme will to power is the stamping of the character of Being upon becoming as the attempt to impose order upon the “fluctuating carnival-masks” of the “eternal cycle of genesis, growth, decay and death – becoming.”

It is my view that Nietzsche aimed to experiment with the will to power as a means to explain the “how” of the ceaseless¹² becoming he posits is reality. As he says when commenting on his projected book: “Under the not un-dangerous title ‘The Will to Power,’ a new philosophy, or said more clearly, the attempt at a *new interpretation of everything that happens* has come to light” (NL 40[50] KSA 11.653, emphasis mine). In other words, the will to power is postulated as a way to explain the quality of reality understood in a way that cannot be reduced to the traditional conception of static Being, and so constitutes a non-traditional “ontology” that encapsulates all the other characterisations Nietzsche gives to the will to power. How?

Nietzsche presents becoming as a strife between power centres, that are themselves constantly becoming. As he explains in *Beyond Good and Evil*, these power-centres “strain towards and away” from one another (BGE 19 KSA 5.32-33), i.e. they are engaged in relations of attraction and repulsion, integration and disintegration, incorporation or alliance, and so on. This point is echoed in an unpublished note:

—:there are no durable ultimate units, no atoms, no monads: here too “beings” are introduced by us (as practical, useful, perspectival grounds) - “Forms of domination”; the sphere of that which is dominated continually growing or periodically increasing or decreasing depending upon the favourability or unfavourability of circumstances. [...] “Value” is essentially the point of view for the increase or decrease of these dominating centres (“multiplicities” in any case, but “units” are not present in the nature of becoming) - a quantum of power, a becoming, in so far as none of it has the character of “being” [...] there is no will: there are punctuated instances of willing that are constantly increasing or losing their power (NL 11 [73] KSA 13.36-37, translation modified).

From this note, it is again evident that there is a linkage established between becoming, power and will. “Becoming” is once more characterised as a repudiation of the concept of static Being; and the idea of a “durable unit” - a self in the traditional sense – is regarded as a merely useful way of speaking. Instead of durable, ultimate units, Nietzsche proposes that

¹² Although I have not provided a discussion thereof, I think that Nietzsche’s conception of becoming is radically anti-teleological. As he says, for example, in an unpublished note: “[i]f the world could ever become rigid, dry, die out, or become nothing, or if it could reach a state of equilibrium, or if it had any goal that involved duration, immutability, the once-and-for-all (in short, speaking metaphysically: if becoming *could* resolve itself into being or into nothingness), then this state must have been attained. But it has not been attained...” (NL 14 [188] KSA 13.375, translation mine). See Swift (2008) for a fuller discussion of Nietzsche’s anti-teleological stance in this context.

reality consists of “dominating centres,” and that these “punctuated instances of willing” are constantly increasing or losing their power – they *are* becoming.

The above claim is encountered in various other places in Nietzsche’s work. In the context of a discussion of the limitations of mechanistic theory, for example, Nietzsche elaborates on his rejection of the traditional notions of “[s]ubject, object, a doer added to the doing, the doing separated from what it does...” (NL 14 [79] KSA 13.258). In his view, mechanistic theory is based upon two fictions – the concept of motion and the concept of the atom (*ibid.*). He claims that if we eliminate all the “additions” postulated by mechanistic theory, then:

...no things are left over but dynamic quanta, that are in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their ‘effect’ on the same - The will to power is not a being, not a becoming, but as a pathos is the most elementary fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge ... (NL 14 [79] KSA 13.259, WP 635)

This note reiterates the idea that things in the world are, for Nietzsche, “dynamic quanta” that are related in a relationship of tension¹³ to all other dynamic quanta. It also makes clear that the will to power is itself neither a being nor a becoming for Nietzsche, but rather, as he says, a basic “fact” from which becoming emerges.¹⁴ It would seem, at first glance, that Nietzsche is here proposing that the will to power is the ground from which the world as becoming emerges, and so, as such, allows for Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche as metaphysician to find confirmation. However, the way in which Nietzsche writes about “facts” on other occasions means that we need to interpret this line with caution. Nietzsche claims, for example, that “there are no eternal facts: just as there are no absolute truths” (HAH I [2] KSA 2.25). The will to power then cannot be a transcendent or unquestionable truth, nor can it be a “fact” if the common sense¹⁵ understanding of a “fact” is utilised. It is,

¹³ Although I do not explore this in detail here, a link between Nietzsche’s characterisation of the will to power and his discussion of the Greek *agon* can certainly be made. In *Homer’s Contest* he characterises the agonistic contest as a fight motivated by the desire for distinction, and not as a fight of “annihilation” (HC KSA 1.783-792). The will to power is similarly characterised by Nietzsche as a-teleological and on-going. See for example Cox (1999) and especially Siemens (2009) for a fuller discussion of the link.

¹⁴ See also *Beyond Good and Evil* 259 where Nietzsche again calls the will to power the “...primordial fact of all history.” (BGE 259 KSA 5.208).

¹⁵ See Chalmers (1999) for an illuminating exposition of the common sense view of “facts.”

as Nietzsche admits, rather only one possible interpretation amongst others,¹⁶ and as such, does not appeal to what Heidegger would call the “onto-theological.”¹⁷

Understanding what Nietzsche intends by the word “pathos” in this passage is complicated by this Greek word having a number of possible meanings. Tracy B. Strong (2006, p. 95) suggests reading Nietzsche’s use of the word “pathos” in the context of aphorism 317 in *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche distinguishes between *pathos* and *ethos*. Strong (*ibid.*) concludes that *pathos* can be characterised as that which “happens to a person or a thing” and “what one has experienced: good or bad,” and so refers to the “different states a person or thing” may assume.¹⁸ I think Strong is correct in his reading that Nietzsche asserts that even though we may think of our way of life as an enduring *ethos*, our life is really *pathos* - a dynamic process of changing affective experience. The will to power, by which our experience is constituted, can be interpreted as *pathos* in this sense.¹⁹

Is this kind of reading of the will to power sustainable? There are a number of commentators, including most recently Brian Leiter (2000) and Maudemarie Clark (1990), who present objections to the kind of “strong” reading of the will to power I support here.²⁰ Leiter objects to strong readings of the will to power on a number of counts. First, he claims that it is difficult to reconcile such readings with the fact that Nietzsche says “almost

¹⁶ As Nietzsche asks in *Beyond Good and Evil* 22: “Supposing that this [‘the will to power’] also is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better.” (BGE 22 KSA 5.37).

¹⁷ My position can, in *this* sense, be aligned to that of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter’s (1999b) interpretation. Müller-Lauter provides an alternative to Heidegger’s interpretation of the will to power by showing how Nietzsche accentuates the pluralistic character of reality by means of seeing it as a multiplicity of conflicting wills to power. As is well known, Müller-Lauter highlights the contradictions in Nietzsche’s writings, and gives them a positive connotation by claiming that the contradictions of reality itself become evident in them. Müller-Lauter’s view is that the various contradictions are evident in human being herself (*ibid.*). The strong individual is able to organise these contradictions within herself, whereas the weak is unable to do so. As such, the struggle for power is, in Müller-Lauter’s reading, the principle of reality for Nietzsche, but not in the sense in which Heidegger proposes.

¹⁸ This reading is similar to that of Stack (1983, p. 298-99). Stack compares the Aristotelian conception of *pathos* with his interpretation of Nietzsche’s use thereof, something that I do not discuss here.

¹⁹ As Golomb (2012, p. 56) rightly, in my view, points out, Nietzsche would have been more consistent if he had used the expression “*pathos of power*” rather than “will to power.”

²⁰ Leiter’s (2000) view of what constitutes a “strong” reading of the will to power is couched in both wide and narrower terms in his paper, something that I do not discuss here. I take it that because my reading suggests that Nietzsche’s will to power constitutes a “fundamental principle” (Leiter 2000, p. 285) of reality - even though I do not read it as a fundamental principle in the usual sense - my reading falls within the ambit of what Leiter would call a “strong” reading, and so is open to the criticisms he suggests.

nothing” about the will to power, plus says “nothing at all” to suggest that it is his “fundamental principle” in *Ecce Homo* (where he reflects upon his life’s work) nor in the series of new prefaces he wrote for a number of his published works in 1886 (Leiter 2000, p. 285). Leiter’s view is that because much of the textual evidence for reading the will to power as a fundamental principle has been drawn from the *Nachlass* such readings are doubtful (Leiter 2000, p. 287).

My approach is similar to that taken by scholars like Bernd Magnus and Linda Williams who “...do not advise ignoring the *Nachlass* entries altogether, but they also do not treat the entries with the same degree of confidence as the works Nietzsche authorized for publication.” (Williams 1996, p. 1). Although I think that key importance should be given to Nietzsche’s published works, I do not believe that the notes are completely without significance. As Nietzsche’s notes, they do allow the reader access to ideas with which he may have experimented, or eventually deemed suitable for publication. In addition, there are a number of places in the published works where a strong reading would indeed be appropriate (for example BGE 13, 36, and 186; as well as GS 349), something that Leiter largely ignores.

Leiter (*ibid.*) further cites the fact that Nietzsche abandons work on his projected book using the doctrine as its title; as well as Nietzsche’s own claim that the will to power is only one “interpretation” among many,²¹ as additional reasons to doubt whether such a strong reading of the will to power is sustainable. We have few definite clues as to why Nietzsche abandoned writing the projected book²² and so this does not, in my view, on its own constitute a reason for dismissing a strong reading of the will to power out of hand. In fact, Ansell-Pearson and Large (2006, p. 306) come to the opposite conclusion to Leiter, claiming that precisely because Nietzsche spent much effort in devising plans for his magnum opus, “...clearly the principle of the will to power was important to [Nietzsche] even if he never articulated it to the extent he wished in his published writings...”. Furthermore, it is my view that taking Nietzsche’s proclamation that all reality is will to power seriously is coherent

²¹ "Supposing that this ['will to power'] also is only interpretation—" he says, "and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better" (BGE 22 KSA 5. 37).

²² See Magnus, Stewart and Mileur (1993, p. 37-46) for a detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s abandonment of his plans for *The Will to Power*.

with his claim that the will to power is “also [...] only interpretation.” (BGE 22 KSA 5. 37). In order to remain consistent with his own perspectivist²³ position, Nietzsche cannot posit the will to power as an absolute teleological principle – for him, *all* “theories of life and knowledge” are matters of “translation” and “interpretation”. (*ibid.*) But saying this does not, however, preclude positing that the will to power be understood in the strong sense. Rather, it only restricts the way it can be characterised as a “principle”²⁴- as a-teleological, non-linear and non-progressive.

Lastly, Leiter (*ibid.*) cites Clark’s (1990) argument that Nietzsche would reject the strong doctrine of the will to power. There she begins by emphasizing that the vexing Section 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*²⁵ is stated as a conditional: *if* we accept certain initial hypotheses, specifically the “causality of the will,” then only does the strong doctrine of the will to power follow. Clark then attempts to show that the idea of the causality of the will is rejected by Nietzsche and so concludes that the strong doctrine does not follow. More specifically, to argue for this hypothetical conditionality, Clark (1990, p. 213) reads the passage as asking the reader to “suppose” that “nothing is ‘given’ as real, excepting for our world of desires and passions.” If we do so, then only would the world “be ‘will to power’ and nothing else.” For Clark (1990), Nietzsche argues only that we must endorse the conclusion if we endorse the premises, i.e. Nietzsche is *not* claiming that the world *is* will to power. For Clark (1990), it is the nature of the passage itself that leads the reader to question whether he really accepts the premises, but also that it is impossible that Nietzsche endorse several of the premises, most especially the first premise, which concerns what is “‘given’ as real,” as well as a later premise that affirms the causality of the will.²⁶

²³ With Strong (1985, p. 165), I understand Nietzsche’s perspectivalism as an attempt to advance a characterization of the self and of knowledge that “...does not posit any particular position (or self) as final”.

²⁴ This is the position of Ciano Aydin (2007). Aydin sees the will to power not as a substance, but rather as a principle with which Nietzsche attempts to deconstruct substance thinking.

²⁵ “The world seen from inside, the world defined and designated according to its ‘intelligible character’ – it would simply be ‘Will to Power,’ and nothing else. (BGE 36 KSA 5.55).

²⁶ It is important to note that in Clark and Dudrick (2012), a revised version of this argument is espoused. The authors there admit to following Clark (1990) in arguing against the conclusion that Nietzsche there endorses an argument for an ontological reading of BGE 36 (Clark and Dudrick 2012, p. 229), but they do concede that the entirety of the argument in Clark (1990) cannot be supported. They revise the argument by firstly, admitting that “there is a sense in which Nietzsche can accept the argument’s first premise” regarding what is “given,” which they supplement with the claim that Nietzsche accepts the causality of the will. Secondly, they allow for Janaway’s (2007, p. 156) claim that Nietzsche uses BGE 36 “to float an idea that is emphatically his own” but continue to deny that Nietzsche’s idea of the will to power is an ontological doctrine, but rather a

Clark (1990) is correct, I think, in highlighting the fact that Nietzsche rejects the idea of the mechanistic understanding of the causality of the will, and also in pointing out that the section under discussion is stated as a conditional. I am not, however, convinced that this rules out the kind of “strong” reading of the will to power I support. I read Nietzsche as here placing the will to power in opposition to the mechanistic model of causality in the same way in which he does in the previously quoted unpublished note (NL 14 [79] KSA 13.258-259, WP 635). In both cases, I would agree that:

...the conclusion turns out to be not so much the inference from the hypothetically formed arguments but rather their summary or even their foundation. The hypotheses are not so much the opening of a testing procedure but rather the elaboration of a proposal for a particular interpretation. That the world would be will to power is not the (eventual) conclusion of an argument but rather the wording of a perspective which allows for a particular type of interpretation (Van Tongeren 2000, p. 158)

So, in reading the aphorism purely as a hypothetical argument, and not taking into account an unpublished note that functions, in my view, in a similar fashion, Clark (1990) seems, I think, to miss Nietzsche’s point. Both the aphorism and the note are indicative of Nietzsche’s particular style of interpretation, which renders misguided the question of what it would mean to offer a conclusive proof of the experiment suggested by the aphorism. Nietzsche is not a metaphysician in the sense in which Heidegger intends the term, since he is not, in my view, attempting to show that the world really *is* will to power, but rather offering a non-teleological “principle” that he believes can better explain the “how” of the ceaseless becoming that “is” reality. As Ansell-Pearson strikingly puts it, the will to power can fruitfully be interpreted as a “nonteleological and nonmechanical principle” that allows “...the primacy of the ‘spontaneous, expansive, aggressive, form-shaping forces’ that provide life with new directions and new interpretations...” to come into focus (Ansell-Pearson 2000, p. 22).

psychological one, a claim about the soul (Clark and Dudrick 2012, p. 230). These supplements to Clark (1990) do not, however, affect my argument as presented in this paper. My position can be aligned with that presented by Paul Loeb (2015) in his “Will to Power and Pansychism: A New Exegesis of Beyond Good and Evil 36”. Loeb (2015, p. 59) rejects Clark’s position because it cannot “adequately explain the exoteric choices attributed to Nietzsche.” In his view, her approach (and others) are based on the “false assumption that BGE 36 includes a background anthropomorphism” (*ibid.*). This is in line with my position as presented in this paper.

3 Conclusion

I have demonstrated that Heidegger's position is problematic in its assertion that the will to power is a traditional metaphysical unity if we take seriously Nietzsche's statements on becoming and his rejection of the traditional "subject" as a willing, atomic unity. Specifically, I have shown that Heidegger's opposition of the will to power to becoming (and his view of it as the principle that "permanentises" becoming) cannot be sustained. I have then provided some support for a "strong" reading of the will to power that does not stand in contradiction to Nietzsche's understanding of becoming, but that also does not turn it into an ontotheological principle in the way in which Heidegger's interpretation does. I have not here attempted to develop this reading in depth and detail,²⁷ nor have I discussed all possible objections to such a position, since my aim is only to show that Heidegger's reading, although still highly influential and insightful in numerous places, suffers from a violent ambivalence that makes it particularly difficult to support, and that this violence emerges in sharp relief if Heidegger's interpretation of the will to power in the context is read specifically in the context of the concept of becoming.

²⁷ A number of other commentators have done just this, most notably Aydin (2007), who attempts to develop an "organisation-struggle" model as a way to understand Nietzsche's view of reality as will to power.

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