Will to Power as Interpretation: Unearthing the Authority of
Nietzsche’s Re-Evaluation of Values
Grace Hunt
New School for Social Research
huntg85@newschool.edu

It goes without saying that I do not deny — unless I am a fool — that many
actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called
moral ought to be done and encouraged — but I think that one should be
couraged and the other avoided for other reasons than hitherto. We have to
learn to think differently — in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even
more: to feel differently.

- Nietzsche, *Daybreak* §103

Introduction

Contrary to the usual charge of unfettered perspectivism found in his early and mid-
period writings, Nietzsche stopped refuting truth *tout court* in his later work. In fact, his views in
his unpublished works compiled in *The Will to Power* appear to rely on both radical
perspectivism (‘there are no facts, only interpretations’) and non-perspectival truths and
valuations that at times appear to carry metaphysical weight (for instance, Nietzsche depicts the
universe as will to power and eternal return; that is, as a recurring succession of dynamic forces
[§1062-1067]). Trying to reconcile these views has proven difficult not least because Nietzsche’s
ability to assert his own philosophy of will to power as an authoritative account (and thereby as
one that should be taken seriously over past accounts of the will) is undermined by his incessant
practice of refuting metaphysical truth.

---

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudiced of Morality*. R. J. Hollindale, Trans.,
2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollindale, Trans., Walter
Kaufmann, Ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968). Subsequent citations from this text will be cited
within my essay as WP.
The problem of truth is obviously not new to Nietzsche scholars. On the one hand, if we take up the American empiricist tradition — understanding, as Walter Kaufmann does, Nietzsche’s later accounts of eternal recurrence as empirical truths (not true \textit{a priori}) — it seems that we avoid the problem of metaphysics altogether.\(^3\) On the other hand, if we take the more traditional reading of Nietzsche established by Heidegger, we find eternal recurrence and its principle of will to power depicted as truths in the strong sense; as metaphysical or \textit{a priori} truths. According to the Heideggerian reading, Nietzsche contradicts himself and “remains caught in the net of the correspondence theory of truth, and of metaphysics in general, even while he delivers fatal objections to them.”\(^4\) Both options offer potentially unsatisfactory accounts of Nietzsche’s later understanding of truth: Kaufmann’s account, only narrowly (if at all) avoids the problem of metaphysics because his account fails to reconcile the fact that Nietzsche \textit{did} make straightforward claims about the nature of reality, although Heidegger’s rigorous account of the radical nature of Nietzsche’s philosophy escapes the difficulties faced by Kaufmann’s empiricist account but does too little to vindicate the disparity between Nietzsche’s two very different accounts of the eternal return.\(^5\) My work springs from a recommendation by Maudemarie Clark that we need not accept either reading of Nietzsche, because his main concern "is not the \textit{truth} of recurrence, but the psychological consequences of accepting it."\(^6\) My understanding of Nietzsche therefore shifts the stakes towards the psychological benefits of his thought.

But granting this obvious tension within Nietzsche’s work, how are we to affirm the authority of Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of values over past evaluations? That is, how are we to assert Nietzsche’s critique of moral value as derived from \textit{ressentiment} (the inversion of a historically non-moral value system, which is to say the perverse inversion of good/bad valuations in to good/evil)? If Nietzsche's theory of human motivation lacks an explicit normative force (due in part to his commitment to perspectivism), on what grounds can it be

\(^4\) Ibid., 7.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 248. My emphasis.
accepted as a more desirable and authoritative alternative to the values created by *ressentiment*? As an attempt to answer this question, my work explores on what grounds Nietzsche asserts the will to power as a psychological explanation of human motivation, that is, as an inherent striving to express and promote individual power.

My work here adopts a predominantly Deleuzian reading of will to power, one that exemplifies the tensions and struggles in force that underlie Nietzsche's work. This reading privileges the expression of force as the source of creativity. As such, the problem of *ressentiment* is one of failed expression – and I think that is right. But Deleuze's reading is not without its problems. One such problem I see with Deleuze's account is that it risks over-privileging strength and power as exertion, giving rise to a reading of Nietzsche's will to power as the "championship of power-hungry alpha animals over less aggressive, acquiescent souls." 7 Nicholas Birns' work illustrates an important distinction between power and force, a distinction that Nietzsche himself made: "the powerful natures dominate, it is a necessity, they need not lift one finger." 8 In addition to a Deleuzian emphasis of power as overt force, I take it that power can also be expressed through passivity, withdrawal and restraint. 9 My emphasis on the power and creativity of resignation to one's life as it is, that is, to one's fate, is meant to temper a fantasy of pure overcoming: "Nietzsche's ultimate strategy for trumping *ressentiment* may not be to oust it," Birns reminds us, "but to learn to live with it." 10 Simply put, Deleuze's language of force at times risks conflating power with overt force. Nonetheless, what makes Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche especially germane to my work and the problem of interpretation is its systematic emphasis on expression of force as creativity. Deleuze interprets the expression as force 'all the way down' to the level of the drives and cellular biology, which gives consistency to a naturalized understanding of Nietzsche's psychology and existentialism.

9 Birns, 19.
Therefore, rather than vindicating or reproaching Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of values based on metaphysical grounds, my work locates and assesses the normative force of Nietzsche’s argument for the re-evaluation of values according to its psychological and existential standing. I contend that life-affirmation is best gauged through Nietzsche's psychological account of human activity rather than gauging its status as truth in the traditional sense. I posit the authority of his work in its ability to expose and actively critique the ascetic ideals of *ressentiment* and its tenacious commitment to a faulty interpretation of life as will to nothingness. If we read Nietzsche’s challenge to truth as a challenge to *the structure of reasons immanent to our desire to believe*, then Nietzsche’s work is not a critique of truth *per se*. It is, instead, a challenge to the reasons that justify our various commitments to certain truths and to certain ways of life, reasons Nietzsche finds self-denying and life defeating.

To argue this, I will first offer an account of the problem of nihilism in order to accurately locate the line of reasoning (namely, the ascetic ideal) that underlies the valuations that Nietzsche’s philosophy of will challenges. Second, focusing on his account of will to power, I will demonstrate how the psycho-existential account of force explains human motivation and subsequently, human value within a world of inherent flux. This explanation marks the re-evaluation of values on non-moral terms. Third, I will demonstrate how this re-evaluation gains authority by actively critiquing the nihilist’s attachment to the ascetic ideal, thereby provoking creativity or resignation – both valorized responses to one's fate (even a man of *ressentiment* could resign to his fate and thereby command Nietzsche's respect). Moreover, such a provocation motivates those with enough strength to think against self-misunderstandings engendered by *ressentiment*. Granting this, I conclude that the authority of Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of values is best gauged *not on the basis of its being metaphysically true, but on the basis of its ability to simultaneously establish a new life-affirming ideal and critique the escapism and self-denial that fuels current human motivation and valuation*. This new ideal, to be sure, is not a final answer to the problem of authority; it has merely contingent strength, which is to say, Nietzsche's re-evaluation holds insofar as it expresses itself in creative ways. The difficulty faced by the person of *ressentiment*, is that he cannot accept his fate in a world that lacks transcendent meaning. The difficulty, as I see it, is then not to prove or disprove the metaphysical worth or accuracy of
Nietzsche's understanding of the world, but rather to use his interpretation as a guide to incessantly critique the reasons inherent to our valuations.

**Part One: Ascetic Ideal and Nihilism**

The proclamation of the death of God announces the cultural rejection of objective and universal moral law. This is a problem for both Christians and atheists, to be sure; both groups struggle to maintain a system of values in the absence of divine order. They live, so to speak, in the shadow of God. As nihilists, they suffer from the realization of the contingency of life; there is no divine order or unity, indeed no inherent meaning. This depiction I think characterizes the most commonly employed notion of nihilism; that is, the inability to value following an explicit realization that the world that lacks inherent meaning. Without God, the nihilist can neither affirm nor deny the meaninglessness.\(^\text{11}\) *On the Genealogy of Morals*\(^\text{12}\) describes the nihilist as he who turns against the meaninglessness of life and denounces all worldly things. Desperately seeking any way to make sense of the emptiness, the nihilist clings to an ascetic approach to life. Such an approach is experienced as “the longing,” Nietzsche tells us, “to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself”; it is *a will to nothingness*.\(^\text{13}\) Unable to satiate this longing, the nihilist would rather will nothing at all.\(^\text{14}\) “*This* is precisely what the ascetic ideal means,” Nietzsche announces, “that something was *lacking*, that man was surrounded by a fearful *void* — he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning.”\(^\text{15}\) Because the problem is not suffering per se, but the *meaninglessness of suffering*, the ascetic ideal offered an interpretation, thereby giving suffering meaning. In this section I will illustrate the ways in which the ascetic interpretation of life is based on deep misunderstandings of the instinctual drives of man; misunderstandings defended according to faulty reasoning inherent to the ascetic ideal.

---

\(^\text{11}\) Nietzsche, *WP* §12.

\(^\text{12}\) Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘*On the Genealogy of Morals and ‘Ecce Homo.’*’ Walter Kaufmann, Trans., Ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), III §28. Subsequent citations from this text will be cited within my essay as GM.

\(^\text{13}\) Nietzsche, *GM* III §28.


\(^\text{15}\) *Ibid.*
To be sure, the difference between Nietzsche and the nihilist (Nietzsche himself admits that he was once a nihilist) is that the reality of the world, void of moral and metaphysical comforts, becomes oppressive and insufferable only for the nihilist. However, insofar as nihilism recognizes the utter contingency and meaninglessness of life, Nietzsche recognizes that nihilism might be “a divine way of thinking.”\textsuperscript{16} Throughout Essay 3 of Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche reveals an ambiguous attitude towards the ascetic ideal and its nihilist. On the one hand, Nietzsche expresses strong disdain for the ascetic priests who, acting as shepherds, maintain the petty life of the herd via the promotion of the herd’s self-abnegation and contempt.\textsuperscript{17} On the other hand, Nietzsche believes that the ascetic philosopher often expresses a “severe and cheerful continence with the best will.”\textsuperscript{18} This ambiguity enables us to understand the nihilist as being in a pathological transition stage; nihilism acknowledges a world without inherent value or truth (an acknowledgement that Nietzsche respects), yet clings to the ascetic ideal as the only way to interpret suffering (the source of Nietzsche's disdain). The possibility for transition stems from Nietzsche’s psychological distinction between passive and active forms of nihilism. Whereas the passive nihilist is more inclined to remain chained to an insatiable desire for suffering and the denial of life, the active nihilist attempts to surpass rather than succumb to his pathos and emerges with an inclination to re-interpret life in different ways. The creation of meaning in the presence of perceived meaninglessness is a truly noble. Key to understanding nihilism then is the acknowledgement of meaninglessness as a horizon of possibility for meaning. Situating the separation between passive and active nihilism in the ability to overcome a self-negation in the face of meaninglessness will prove to be the heart of the matter for Nietzsche re-evaluation of values.

The most menacing predicament created by the ascetic interpretation is that even though the ideal was intended to save man from “suicidal nihilism,” it inevitably brings “fresh suffering with it, deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive suffering.”\textsuperscript{19} Priestly asceticism (in contrast to the artistic asceticism that is praised for self-mastery) brought with it a

\textsuperscript{16} Nietzsche, \textit{WP} §15.
\textsuperscript{17} Nietzsche, \textit{GM} III §11.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.} §9.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid} §28.
new valuation for the instincts of pity: self-abnegation and self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{20} Before the death of
God, man’s feeling of guilt created by his ineluctable animal instincts — instincts experienced as the ultimate antithesis to God — could be redeemed by a God who sacrificed himself for the
guilt of mankind.\textsuperscript{21} With the redeemer gone, the nihilist seeks a new release from his perpetual
guilt and suffering. The ascetic ideal emerges as a viable route towards this end; it offers the
nihilist two related reactive paths towards the release of his bad conscience: will against the
happy and strong few and will against himself.

Such willing provides the nihilist with albeit weak feelings of power through his exertion
of hatred against others and himself. Directed against others, Nietzsche calls this exertion of hate
“the conspiracy of the suffering against the well-constituted and victorious.”\textsuperscript{22} The result of the
misguided exertion of contempt is ressentiment, the most prominent, insidious, and indeed life-
threatening psychological disposition promoted by asceticism. It is the inexhaustible, insatiable
lust of revenge that becomes internalized and never enacted. Plagued with ressentiment, nihilists
do not exist, but rather subsist in their efforts to poison the “consciences of the fortunate with
their own misery.”\textsuperscript{23} The only pleasure available to such ‘offensive creatures’ is found in their
profound disgust and the infliction of pain upon themselves. They “inflict as much pain on
themselves as they possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain — which is probably their only
pleasure.”\textsuperscript{24} Willed against himself, the nihilist’s hatred is exerted, as I have already mentioned,
in the form of self-abnegation. The nihilist turns his will against his own impulses; the will is
expressed as power over one's self. This self-abnegation keeps the will weak from self-hatred
and self-denial such that the outward exertion of power is blocked; “human beings got their
sense of power by directing the same instincts against the self – by hurting and persecuting
themselves rather than others.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid Preface §6.
\textsuperscript{21} Nietzsche, \textit{GM} II §22.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid III §14.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. §15.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. §11.
\textsuperscript{25} Clark, 231.
To be sure, however, the will of the ascetic nihilist is not without a will to power. What he suffers from is an inability to act while his will continues to will. His will, internalized and directed at himself, is “the will to deny,… a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it still remains a will!”\(^{26}\) Faced with an overpowering feeling of impotence, the ascetic ideal infuses the nihilist's life with reactive valuations of hatred and revenge that are in effect turned against himself.

I think we might rightfully ask why the ascetic nihilist’s negative valuation is not a viable expression of affirmation, insofar as his weak expression of power over himself is nonetheless an expression of power. Clark argues that for Nietzsche, affirming the ascetic ideal is “a logical, but not a psychological, possibility.”\(^{27}\) I find this reading too strong, for certainly, the form of nihilism promoted by the ascetic priest and subsequently adopted by the nihilist can be and is expressed. The ascetic ideal may be a stunted and distorted mode of being, but it is nonetheless a psychological possibility. The problem is not the ideal’s psychological impossibility, but rather its great psychological cost, namely self-abnegation and contempt for others. This form of self-denial is not psychologically impossible, as Clark claims, but is the cause of great psychological strife based in misguided complacency with the Christian ideal of asceticism.

This strife is not least because in his attempt to sustain life, the nihilist obstructs his “deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact.”\(^{28}\) These instincts, as Nietzsche sees them, are what found an inherent desire to exert force. Nietzsche tells us that the self-contradiction of asceticism — “life against life” — is both a psychological and physiological absurdity.\(^{29}\) He says that this contradiction is merely apparent, “a kind of provisional formulation, an interpretation

---

\(^{26}\) Nietzsche, \textit{GM} III §28. From this reading, Clark makes the further claim that Nietzsche rejects metaphysics not least because the world simply lacks the inherent truth and order that metaphysics ascribes to it, but also because metaphysics expresses the nihilistic ascetic ideal that constitutes a threat to life (23). Deleuze agrees on this point, indeed, he maintains that nihilism is the presupposition of all metaphysics because “there is no \textit{metaphysics} that does not judge and depreciate life in the name of a \textit{supra-sensible} world.” See Deleuze’s \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, Hugh Tomlinson, Trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 34. According to both these readings then, rejecting the life-devaluing ascetic ideal thereby entails rejecting metaphysical truth.

\(^{27}\) Clark, 195.

\(^{28}\) Nietzsche, \textit{GM} III §13.

\(^{29}\) \textit{Ibid}. 
and psychological misunderstanding of something whose real nature could not for a long time be understood or described *as it really was.*\(^{30}\) The ascetic ideal, in all its self-denial, is in fact merely “an artifice for the preservation of life.”\(^{31}\) That is, the negating tendency of the ascetic ideal derives from a protective instinct; man strives to protect himself from the meaninglessness of life.\(^{32}\) Nietzsche finds this deeply troubling precisely because it is an interpretation based on misunderstandings of the value of life (life as preservation rather than expenditure).

To be sure, Nietzsche’s problem with asceticism is not its weakness or self-affliction, but its failure in expression. Ascetic nihilism is criticized by Nietzsche throughout the *Genealogy* not in an effort to convince people to overcome it, but in order to expose the nihilist's attempts, made in vain, to overcome suffering by further inflicting hate. It is not the nihilistic state *per se* that Nietzsche chastises, but rather the wasted effort against resigning to one's fate, to living with one's pain. Of course, Nietzsche believed that pain was very important, and that it gave life meaning. But the ascetic ideal tries to fight against the meaninglessness of pain, by inverting the values and trying to understand the pain as meaningful. This false inversion is the deception that we can see Nietzsche despising. But he also accepts it as an existential fact. Nietzsche is not trying to provoke a wholesale attack against the values of *ressentiment* but rather awareness by way of genealogy that our values are inverted from previous non-moral valuations. Nietzsche scathing criticism of the ascetic priest and his herd must not be heard as some quest for the eradication of the weak, because even in passivity, withdrawal, and restraint, *power can be exerted.*

Before addressing the will to power, I will briefly address what Nietzsche sees as the difficulty of the possibility of re-interpretation. In Nietzsche’s words, “One interpretation among others was shipwrecked, but as it passed for the only possible interpretation it seems existence no longer has meaning, that everything is in vain.”\(^{33}\) The ascetic ideal is 'shipwrecked' in as much as it offers only a disingenuous sense of life-affirmation through the denial of life. The ascetic

\(^{30}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{32}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{33}\) Deleuze, 23.
ideal and its moral valuations thereby afford the nihilist a petty feeling of mastery in the face of contingency and meaninglessness. Equipped with a mere ‘no,’ the nihilist’s only option is to deny himself and the world. It is therefore as if by magic that “the No he says to life brings to light … an abundance of tender Yeses; even when he wounds himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction—the very wound itself afterward compels him to live.”34 Compelled by his own self-inflicted injury, the nihilist’s motivation to exist comes from the denial of life. But this provides the nihilist with only a feigned victory over life’s meaninglessness. That is, rather than resulting in an experience of mastery over life, “asceticism amounts to being outsmarted or mastered by life.”35 Nietzsche finds this misunderstanding to be inherent to ascetic interpretation.

In the following section I will elucidate the Deleuzian reading of Nietzsche's account of force as it pertains to the ability to will affirmatively and outwardly towards the world, not against it. This will enable me to begin spelling out a new mode of interpretation, one that finds value in the very meaninglessness of existence without leaning on the inadequate and troubling sense of security afforded to the nihilist by the ascetic ideal.

Part Two: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Will to Power

Nietzsche understands human life in terms of a mass of forces each striving according to its own will to power. Forces are characterized by their differentiation from one another; there is no force without its relation to other forces. The will to power is the principle according to which force operates. The will to power, simply put, is the theory that all inner drives strive to exert themselves externally and upon other wills. The will gains strength through this exertion and thereby experiences pleasure. This theory is developed out of Nietzsche's genealogy that begins with Greek nobility, the 'well-born' and 'rounded men' "replete with energy and therefore necessarily active" who knew very well that "happiness should not be sundered from action."36

34 Nietzsche, GM III §13.
35 Clark, 234.
36 Nietzsche, GM I, 10.
form of self-denial and *ressentiment*, Nietzsche’s philosophy of will understands the strength of the will as the ability to actively and creatively exert its power over other forces.

Offering a concrete explanation of the will to power, Nietzsche says:

My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (—its will to power:) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the parts of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement (“union”) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on—. 37

The world is made up of finite forces with no overarching, consistent infinite force. 38 Dynamic force is the constitutive element of all human motivation, which is to say that Nietzsche conflates force and drive, (this idea is privileged in Deleuze's reading). For Nietzsche then, “the only force that exists is of the same kind as that of the will: a commanding over other subjects, which thereupon change.” 39 Nietzsche designates the ‘will to power’ as an insatiable desire to manifest power; it is a creative drive. 40 Will to power is a creative drive because it acts upon other forces, “the stronger will directs the weaker.” 41 Nietzsche explains, “every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all other drives to accept as a norm.” 42

Whereas the interpretation and valuation constructed by the ascetic ideal provided the passive nihilist with a weak sense of power through self-denial, Nietzsche’s will to power reinterprets life according to a much stronger, life-affirming exertion of force. This reinterpretation provides the nihilist with a sense of power and mastery necessary to feel better about life as it is. 43 The satisfaction of the will to power is expressed as the outward exertion of power and is experienced a sense of effectiveness in the world. 44

---

37 Nietzsche, *WP* §636.
43 Clark, 234.
To repeat, Nietzsche’s will to power understands the will as that which seeks release and expression. Against the ascetic interpretation of human life as self-denial and preservation, Nietzsche interprets the will to power as that which “strives after greater strength, and wants to ‘preserve’ itself only indirectly, (it wants to surpass itself—).”\textsuperscript{45} The strength expressed through the will to power, is an expression of our strength and well-being. The will to power is “essentially creating and giving: it does not aspire, it does not seek, it does not desire, … It gives: power is something inexpressible in the will (something mobile, variable, plastic); power is in the will as ‘the bestowing virtue,’ through power the will itself bestows sense and value.”\textsuperscript{46} Against the slogans of the ascetic ideal — poverty, chastity and humility — Nietzsche’s will is plentiful and overflowing.

Understanding of will to power in terms of differentiations of force and the exertion of affirmative power is central to Nietzsche’s critique of the self-denying ascetic will not least because it reveals, in Nietzsche’s view, a more accurate account of human motivation. It is an account that explains life-enhancement as the experience of power, mastery, and creativity (the creation of new values, no less) brought about through affirmative psychological drives. What was found to be problematic about the ascetic ideal and its passive nihilists is that even having announced that God is dead, they do not create new values; they rather stagnate in their own meaningless despair. The will to power is therefore central to Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of values insofar as it interprets meaning and value differently and creatively.

Part Three: Value and Interpretation

Understood in terms of power over others, Nietzsche reframes the value of behavior in terms of whether one’s will to power exerts affirmative psychological drives that enhance life via the active expression of power. In this section, I will reveal how understanding the underlying motivation for all human behavior in terms of will to power underwrites the capacity to create new measures, values and truths that affirm themselves and simultaneously critique, rather than rely on, the ascetic ideal.

\textsuperscript{45} Nietzsche, \textit{WP} §488.
\textsuperscript{46} Deleuze, 85.
Nietzsche’s re-evaluation of values arises from a psycho-existential account of the relational character of force. In each relation, the variations of power exerted by force differ in quality and quantity. The quality of a force is either active or reactive, while the quantity merely denotes the differential relation of force to force.\(^{47}\) Active forces employ a “reaching out for power” and passive forces are “hindered from moving forward: thus an act of resistance and reaction.”\(^{48}\) A will's exertion of sufficient power over other forces is experienced as mastery. Because “there is nothing to life that has value,” Nietzsche tells us, “except the degree of power,” will to power is the key to meaning.\(^{49}\) Rather than suppressing our needs, desires, and wills, “it is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against.”\(^{50}\) By measuring forces not only by their irreducible difference in quantity, but also and importantly by their quality (active/reactive), interpretation becomes the task of estimating “the quality of force that gives meaning to a given phenomenon, or event, and from that to measure the relation of forces that are present.”\(^{51}\) In Nietzsche’s words,

> the will to power interprets…: it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. Mere variations of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the value of whatever else wants to grow. Equal in that—In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something.\(^{52}\)

Nietzsche's understanding of will to power as interpretation implicitly affirms the world as constituted by differentiations of qualities and quantities of force, and that within this world, active forces and affirmative wills dominate and exert power over reactive forces and negative wills.

The art of measuring this flux and the differing quantities and qualities of willed force underwrites Nietzsche’s interpretation. Nietzsche believed that “every strengthening and increase

\(^{47}\) Deleuze, 43.

\(^{48}\) Nietzsche, WP §656.

\(^{49}\) Ibid. §55.

\(^{50}\) Ibid. §481.

\(^{51}\) Deleuze, 53.

\(^{52}\) Nietzsche, WP §643.
of power opens up new perspectives and means of believing in new horizons."\textsuperscript{53} He continues, “Insofar as the word ‘knowledge’ has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. — ‘Perspectivism’.”\textsuperscript{54} Here we arrive at the overall push of this essay. Namely, if all values can be defeated by other values (there is after all, no inherent meaning), and no value is immune to its own perspectivism (there are always new interpretations), by what authority can we affirm Nietzsche’s re-valuation over any other? What I hope to have shown in this section is that Nietzsche’s perspectival approach to value and meaning as interpretation posits a strong case for the normative authority for Nietzsche’s approach. More precisely, if the very existence of interpretation is dependent upon active forces and affirmative wills, then there resides an effective normative twist inasmuch as the authority of the interpretation is inherent to the interpretation itself precisely because interpretation is will to power.

In the final section, I will account for why this new understanding of the will to power as the differentials of force is not merely a new interpretation with which to replace the ascetic ideal. Rather, Nietzsche’s the will to power continually undermines past valuations by actively critiquing nihilism through its power of affirmation.

\textbf{Part Four: Strength of Affirmation}

Having accounted for human motivation in terms of a multiplicity of force directed by one’s will to power, it is the creative power of interpretation that underlies the normative thrust of Nietzsche’s work. As such, immanent creative power of the forces is perhaps the only appropriate grounds for defending the integrity Nietzsche’s re-evaluation. Nietzsche’s will to power offers a new way of esteeming whereby the relation of truth and meaning is valued in reverse. That is, meaning is no longer authorized by its truth, but rather truth is sanctioned according to meaning and interpretation. The value of truth shifts with the acknowledgement that “the methods of truth were not invented from motives of truth, but from motives of power, of

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. §616.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. §481.
wanting to be superior.” Nietzsche then says, “How is truth proved? By the feeling of enhanced power.” The new ideal is based upon the experience of power and the enhancement of life as the path towards truth. Because the ascetic ideal remains fettered to self-denigration of ressentiment, it lacks adequate expression of power. As such, the ascetic ideal loses its credibility as a way to give meaning to life. According to Nietzsche’s new evaluation, the strength of man is measured by how much truth he can bear, for the ability to affirm the reality of the world takes greatest power, a point illustrated by the will to power. Indeed, the will to power “gives: power is something inexpressible in the will (something mobile, variable, plastic); power is the will as ‘bestowing virtue,’ through power the will itself bestows sense and value.”

But for new values to arise, the ascetic ideal must be prevented from replacing itself with other ideals that perpetuate the same inverted values merely in different forms. But the obdurate the ascetic ideal “permits no other interpretation, no other goal; it rejects, denies, affirms, and sanctions solely from the view of its interpretation.” Nietzschean affirmation therefore cannot be a simple substitution of negative with positive willing, but rather calls for the transmutation or conversion of the negative into its opposite. Affirmation entails an active change from denial of life into life’s affirmation. Instead of replacement, “we let nothing of the place itself remain, we want to destroy the place, we want another way of knowing, another concept of truth, that is to say truth which is not presupposed in a will to truth, but which presupposes a completely different will.” Neither reconciliation nor substitution could dismantle or de-activate a will to deny; only the will’s affirmation can separate and breakdown the strength of such negative will. Active and dominant forces, led by a strong will to power weaken the alliance between reactive forces and the will to nothingness to the point where this

---

55 Nietzsche, WP §455.
56 Ibid.
58 Deleuze, 85.
59 Ibid., 99.
60 Nietzsche, GM III §23.
61 Deleuze, 175.
62 Ibid., 99.
negative will “is converted and crosses over to the side of affirmation, and it is related to a power of affirming which destroys the reactive forces themselves.”\(^6^3\) This conversion, attainable through the exertion of force, illustrates the creative power of immanence in Nietzsche’s philosophy of will. Transmutation is the ‘joy of annihilation.’\(^6^4\) With a rethinking of the will as a will to power with active forces and willing affirmations, value and meaning arise through the active and affirmative expression of one’s will to power that is, at bottom, merely the differentiation of qualities and quantities of force immanent to human beings.

**Conclusion**

Nietzsche’s re-evaluation asks what kind of life the ascetic ideal serves. As a way to answer this question, Nietzsche examines our need to believe. Rather than denying truth or the fact that we value, he challenges the reasons found within our desire to value. Asceticism, as I hope to have shown, is founded upon the psychologically untenable situation whereby the nihilist gains a sense of triumph over life as his physiological capacity for life actually decreases.\(^6^5\) Nietzsche exposes this apparent power over life as merely a facade for protection from a degenerating life. Having accounted for the misunderstandings inherent to ascetic justifications for suffering, I illustrated Nietzsche’s alternative philosophy of will. The will to power, with its emphasis on the exertion of power as affirmation and creativity, posits new values that avoid the self-denying expression of nihilism. It is in this way that Nietzsche challenges the reasoning behind our desire for the meaning and values of the ascetic ideal; that is, not merely by replacing the old valuation with a new one, but by demonstrating that negating forces of the ascetic will do not survive against the affirmative power of an active and creative will.

I hope to have shown that Nietzsche’s rich psychological and existential account of life as will to power highlights the seriousness of suffering as well as the insatiable desire to infuse life with meaning, seemingly at any cost. It is in this spirit that Nietzsche directs the active nihilist towards new and different ways to live with that very suffering, by encountering it with


\(^{6^5}\) Nietzsche, *GM* III §11.
affirmative value and meaning. Gauging the authority of an interpretation according its power to affirm, we actively change the way we think about and value truth.
Bibliography


