## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations of Nietzsche’s Work</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1: Perspectivism, Arbitrariness and Self-reference</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Perspectivism?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of Self-reference</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of Arbitrariness</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nehamas’ Response</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2: Arbitrariness as External Problem</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming as Ontological Reality: The Eternal Return</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The World as a Flux of Forces: The Will to Power</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming as Dynamic Selves</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming as Concrete Experience</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Critique</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics as Epistemological Validity</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Position Which Cannot Be Adopted: Aesthetics and Self-reference</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3: Arbitrariness as Immanent Problem</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarathustra vs. The Spirit of Heaviness</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative Creation and Abolishment of Social Relations</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation as Eros</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation and the Problem of Arbitrariness</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutics as Condition for Interpretation</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

There are few commentators on Nietzsche that avoid dealing with the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference in some manner. The problems are so pervasive in Nietzsche’s writing that they impact on almost every aspect of his philosophy. The choice of topic for this dissertation could therefore be seen to engage in an area which has already been well-discussed by Nietzsche scholars. However, even though the problems are wide-spread, there are few works, if any, that offer a systematic discussion of the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference in themselves. The problems these questions pose are instead found more or less implicitly in discussions of other themes which sometimes lead to unfortunate vagueness and confusion. By offering a limited but systematic discussion of the mere problems – how they must be understood, the implications that follow and their plausibility in connection to Nietzsche’s project – I hope to contribute to a greater clarity in reading Nietzsche.

The theme for this dissertation developed during my stay at the University of Essex where I studied continental philosophy as part of my master’s degree at the University of Oslo. As I became familiar with Nietzsche’s philosophy partly through courses given in English I decided to engage in the field of Nietzsche-literature available to the English-speaking world. This implies that all literature referred to, including Nietzsche’s texts, are translated, if not originally written in English. It thus felt natural to write the dissertation itself in English.

I’m thankful to a number of people for their help in bringing this dissertation to completion. My special thanks to Kjell Eyvind Johansen for year-long support and discussions on Nietzsche’s philosophy. Kjell Eyvind first introduced me to Nietzsche in a course he held at the University of Oslo Autumn 2004 and I have since then had the pleasure of discussing Nietzsche on several occasions with him. These enlightening
discussions gave me a deeper insight of Nietzsche’s philosophy. The interest and engagement he has shown in the progress of my further carrier has brought me comfort and belief in my work of invaluable measurement.

I would like to thank the department of philosophy at the University of Essex, where I spent the autumn term 2005, for offering in-depth courses in continental philosophy, Nietzsche-courses among them. In particular my thanks go to David McNeill and Espen Hammer for taking their time answering my questions and giving advice on how to deal with Nietzsche’s perspectivism. The opportunities of presenting aspects of my work have also been very fruitful in developing and clarifying my ideas expressed in this dissertation. I would therefore like to thank the department of philosophy at the University of Southampton and Christopher Janawway for the opportunity I was given to speak at the Southampton Postgraduate Conference on Nietzsche held in March 2006, and Kjell Eivind Johansen for letting me present aspects of my work for his students in his course on philosophy of the 19th century held autumn 2006.

I would also like to express my thanks to my fellow students Odin Fauskevåg and Frieder Vogelmann for giving penetrating comments and criticisms on the text. I am greatly indebted to Colin Hall who generously proofread the finished type-script. Thanks also to Rebecca Carver for comments and corrections on the text and to my brother Johan Edvard Tellum for help in designing the front page.

Most of all, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Arne Johan Vetlesen who has been supportive through the whole process of this dissertation and has contributed to the ideas developed herein. The time and care he has spent in reading drafts, the always enlightening comments, the objections raised, the inspiring questions posed and the unfailing support he has offered goes beyond the limits of any possible thanks.
Abbreviations of Nietzsche’s work

BGE  

GM  

GS  

Z  
Nietzsche stands out as one of the most provocative critics of the philosophical tradition. *On the Genealogy of Morality* for instance, contains a thorough tirade of depreciatory claims of former metaphysical valuations and prevailing Christian morality. Central here stands the critique of taking good and evil as clear-cut distinctions, carrying intrinsic meaning. It should be appreciated that the error does not lie in judging wrong things as being good; Nietzsche does not provide arguments trying to convince us that we must regard other things than what was formerly accepted, as good. It is the way of thinking categorically in terms of universally-held generalisations that is wrong. Alternatively then, Nietzsche suggests that we should let particularity enter the picture, seeing situatedness as essential, allowing for a greater transitoriness and changeability and another way of valuating.

It is against this background that Nietzsche’s perspectivism must be understood; we must regard things in light of the perspective from which they are approached. Valuations and interpretations rely on perspectives, and so does life itself. Expressed in his own words: “To be sure, to speak of spirit and the good [as universally true] as Plato did meant standing truth on her head and denying perspective itself, the basic condition of all life […]”¹ For Nietzsche, perspectives and particularity is what life is about, not an obscure obsession with universally valid truths.

This position, however, is not unproblematic. For does not the claim that every thing relies on perspectives, that all interpretations, valuations and perceptions are purely perspectivistic, imply that judgements are fundamentally arbitrary, so that they rely on the interpretive subject only? Does not every statement become relativistic? Must not every truth be regarded subjectivistic? Moreover, in holding perspectivism as an alternative approach, would this not also demand a justification? And if so, must not this

---

¹ Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 32.
be based on a non-perspectivistic approach to avoid being circular? In short, how suitably does perspectivism stand out as a coherent position to which rational agents can subscribe?

These are questions that will recur throughout this paper. In chapter 1 I will firstly give a more detailed description of the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference, exploring the reason for their arising and diverging between their applications, before giving a brief introduction to perspectivism as an epistemological position. The claim will be that Nietzsche’s perspectivism must be conceived of as an anti-realistic position, rendering the world as composed of perspectives and the thought of a world-in-itself as impossible. Taking these insights into account I will then proceed showing how the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference still pose problems for Nietzsche’s position. Arbitrariness and self-reference must therefore not be thought to emerge only from an epistemological realist’s point of view, but also stand out as problems for anti-realists. In this outline I will rely heavily on Habermas’ interpretation of Nietzsche, pointing out how crucial the problems are for Nietzsche’s philosophy. The chapter will end with a discussion of Nehamas’ attempt to address these problems, showing the implausibility of this response.

In order to deal with the problem of arbitrariness it will become clear that this can be understood both externally and immanently; as questions posed from outside and external to the perspectivistic sphere, demanding answers to this quest for the plausibility of Nietzsche’s alternative approach, or as problems that arise within the frames of perspectivism, thus problems connected to the adoption of Nietzsche’s thesis. In chapter 2 I will consider the problem of arbitrariness understood as external problem. Before showing the implausibility of conceiving Nietzsche’s perspectivism as an arbitrary position, I will give an outline of Nietzsche’s ontology. A successful critique, it will be argued, must manage taking the criticised theory’s ontology into account in order to render it false. Thus, for meaningful and mutual understanding, critiques must also share some standards or premises with the criticised position in order to remain intelligible. I will make use of interpretations offered by Jaspers and Deleuze in this section. Now, with this discussion in mind I will proceed to explore how Nietzsche approaches validity and valid judgements through a sublime vocabulary. For him, validity is a matter of aesthetics
and is described as being creative, redeeming, and affirmative – directed towards the future. In order to achieve such capacities it is of central concern to direct oneself towards becoming, breaking with the traditional view of rendering being as founding our existence. The stress of becoming has crucial implications both for Nietzsche’s worldview (ontology) and for his thought of the constitution of subjects (existentialism) and will be highlighted in particular.

Chapter 3 gives a rather concrete description of how the aesthetic ideal manifests itself in the figure of Zarathustra. We will see how Zarathustra’s actions are redeeming and creative in eventually relating everything confronted to himself, but also conceive to which prize this is done. For does not an essentially self-affirming practise lead to an abolishment of relation to other subjects, leaving Zarathustra not only in solitude but also, ultimately, as an arbitrary interpreter? Here the claim of arbitrariness is certainly immanent since it arises from the actions a truly creative subject (a subject fulfilling the aesthetic ideal) would undertake in Nietzsche’s world-view. A discussion of these claims also constitutes the main part of the chapter. Finally I will briefly suggest a hermeneutical reading of Nietzsche, rendering him free of an accusation of arbitrariness.

Although arbitrariness and self-reference have been described as distinct, genuine problems for Nietzsche’s project and discussed in different sections, I have devoted the problem of arbitrariness greater space than the problem of self-reference. This allows for a deeper understanding of the apparent relativism that Nietzsche’s philosophy provokes. However, a thorough discussion of the problem of arbitrariness cannot avoid taking the problem of self-reference into consideration. The paper in general and the two last chapters in particular, will therefore mainly be concerned with the problem of arbitrariness, giving the problem of self-reference a subordinate function.

While discussing arbitrariness and self-reference as problems to Nietzsche’s position it must also be rendered clear which Nietzsche is in question. In this dissertation I solely address the problems of what has become known as Nietzsche’s later period. More specifically this includes The Gay Science (1882), Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885), Beyond Good and Evil (1886) and On the Genealogy of Morality (1887). The works
omitted from a treatment in this dissertation, but which also belong to his later period, are the works of 1888–1889—Nietzsche contra Wagner, The Antichrist, Twilight of Idols, Dionysian Dithyrambs and Ecce Homo—and the post-scripts published after Nietzsche’s death, now most commonly known under the title The Will to Power. These limitations have made it possible to ascribe the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference to a relatively coherent and consistent outline of perspectivism since Nietzsche tends to give different and sometimes irreconcilable descriptions of the same phenomena, conceiving the authorship as a whole. Limiting myself by focusing on these four works merely was equally important for me so to allow time to consult commentary-literature and to orient myself in the contemporary debate. The works will not be presented chronologically but referred to according to what suits my purposes. However, there is a tendency to present the thoughts developed in Thus spoke Zarathustra in the last chapter, after outlining a more overall view of Nietzsche’s perspectivism and ontology with reference to the three other works. The justification for presenting Thus spoke Zarathustra after the other works stems from the key role Zarathustra inhabits as a teacher of redemption, creation and affirmation. Hence Zarathustra stands out as a manifestation of Nietzschean virtues, a personification of the aesthetic ideal. Thus, the references to Zarathustra point out how it would be to involve oneself in the virtues Nietzsche prescribes, how subjects are composed in the alternative ontology that is launched and how one can orient oneself in a world of perspectives.

It could be useful saying a few words about what is meant by arbitrariness before proceeding to a more substantial account of the two problems in the following chapters. With an arbitrary interpreter I mean a subject possessing power over the interpretations it produces, so that the subject dominates the interpretation. Thus external factors are not conceived as crucially conditioning or limiting a subject’s capacity of producing interpretations. That an interpretation is arbitrary could also be taken to mean that it is somewhat casual; that its production was accidental or that it came into existence by chance. The meaning I want to ascribe to arbitrariness is the former account: that a subject dominates the outcome of its interpretations, valuations, judgments and the like. Although I start off conceiving how arbitrariness composes a problem for Nietzsche’s
perspectivism as an *epistemological* position, I will proceed to address the problems to valuation in general.
Chapter 1: Perspectivism, arbitrariness and self-reference

A statement of the problem
It is common among commentators on Nietzsche to locate his writing on at least two different levels. I believe these two levels can be traced back to a reflection of two distinct problems posed to Nietzsche’s epistemological position, namely the problem of arbitrariness and the problem of self-reference.

On the one hand Nietzsche seems to insist on the urge to bring philosophy up to a higher, richer level free of all “illusions and simplifications.” The suggestion here is that we must acknowledge that our interpretations of the world are based on perspectives and, furthermore, that these perspectives are something that should be embraced and used as a purposive tool. This seems to be a vital ingredient in Nietzsche’s perspectivism. On the other hand, to insist that our views upon the world are merely perspectives requires that we can provide arguments in support of the perspectivistic position. This brings up the question of self-reference; since perspectivism implies that an interpretation of something is only one among many possible interpretations, the perspectivistic position seems threatened because it is itself only one among many available approaches for interpreting the world. It could be argued that a foundation of perspectivism requires a foothold outside the perspectivistic sphere. But such an attempt would not be coherent with the perspectivistic thesis itself since the claim then would be that there exists at least one view that escapes the field of interpretation (namely perspectivism). As Habermas argues, Nietzsche fails to offer a reasonable account of how we orient ourselves in the world because he denies that intersubjective knowledge can be attained: that is, we are unable to achieve mutual understanding on any propositions. In this respect then, any statement of perspectivism that attempts to communicate a propositional truth about the world seems self-defeating. This is reflected by the problem of self-reference.
While the problem of self-reference concerns how perspectivism is possible as an epistemological position, the problem of arbitrariness deals with problems involved in using the perspectivistic method. For if it is up to each individual to make their own interpretations of the world due to the fact that interpretations are made depending upon which perspective is taken upon a topic, every interpretation contains the possibility of diverging from the others. In other words, knowledge as valid, intersubjective statements seems to be undermined because intersubjectivity is not secured. In this statement of the problem it is firstly assumed that all interpreters are fully autonomic in their interpretations of the world, so far, no conditions exist for their interpretations. Secondly it is assumed that such an autonomic interpretation represents the danger of relativism regarding knowledge: since it is up to any interpreter to make individual interpretations, no mutual understanding is secured and knowledge is confronted with the danger of becoming a fully subjectivistic feature, determined only by the different interpreters with their different and sometimes irreconcilable interpretations. In this approach, knowledge is elucidated as something relativistic, subjective and arbitrary and thereby lacks both conditions and methods to decide what could count as valid judgement, except “any judgement” or “no judgement at all.” What I have called the problem of arbitrariness is therefore a problem concerning the perspectivistic “method,” or the consequences of the use of such a method, while the problem of self-reference involves a reflection on how a perspectivistic position can be maintained and justified if we take its theorems to apply to the position itself.

**What is perspectivism?**

In a recent article James Conant brings caution to descriptions of perspectivism where “perspectivism” first is taken in a fairly straightforward meaning of the word (where its content is easy to grasp) but, as the description proceeds, ends up as a philosophical concept which is all-absorbing. One of his chief claims is that commentators on Nietzsche tend to mix up the different sorts of perspectivism, making it into a *philosophical accordion word*: “Such a word, when it is first introduced, appears to have

---

a fairly narrow and straightforward meaning, but through the course of its subsequent employment its meaning is gradually stretched” so that “by the time the philosopher is done with it, the extension of the term has been stretched to the point where anything we are able to think or talk about would appear to have to fall under the extension of the concept it attempts to denote.” Avoiding such a “stretched” concept Conant goes through a variety of philosophical perspectivisms from “Non-naive perspectivism” to “Anti-realist perspectivism.” In the descriptions we can find interesting distinctions between what Conant recognises as different sorts of perspectivism-realism. Even though the differences between the types are clarifying for showing how a “stretched” concept is avoidable, I will go through them briefly, focusing on Conant’s “Anti-realist perspective” and its implications. This is done in order to give an account of different sorts of perspectivism-realism and to allow space to argue for an anti-realist approach. Any further account of how perspectivism avoids slipping into a philosophical accordion word will not be given.

The non-naive perspectivist states that things look different depending upon the circumstances in which they are perceived – i.e. things can appear blue in one light and green in another. The cause of these differences may not be properties intrinsic in the things but rather “relative to some point of view or set of standing conditions under which the objects of experience are encountered.” That this is a version of realism is clear since it operates with (set) objects that even have intrinsic properties – just not the ones that makes the object appear different to us which is a matter of circumstances or outer influence. This makes a distinction between primary and secondary quality properties of the object possible (“Primary quality realism”): “To attain an undistorted conception of the nature of the objects of our perception as they are in themselves, we need to distinguish between those dimensions of our perceptual experience that afford an undistorted representation of the nature of reality as it is in itself [primary quality] and

---

3 Conant, 2005, pp. 36-37.
4 Conant distinguishes four forms of perspectivism within a realistic sphere: “Non-naive perspectivism” – “Primary quality realism” – “Hidden world realism” – “Pseudo Kantianism.” In addition we can find Conant’s preferred alternative “Anti-realist perspectivism,” which, as the name indicates, is not a perspectivism-realism. The term “perspectivism-realism” is introduced by me and tries to emphasise Conant’s point that all the first four types of perspectivism can be seen as form of epistemological realism.
5 Conant, 2005, pp. 20.
those that are due merely to the peculiar character of our perceptual perspective on reality [secondary quality]."\(^6\) Even though nothing has been said about the drawing of the line between primary and secondary quality, the distinction can be clarified by the use of typical examples: objects’ extension in time and space is seen as intrinsic and primary quality, while colour and smell are seen as relying upon the perceiver, and, as such, is not a quality of the object itself. The former must therefore be seen as a perspective on the nature of reality while the latter is something of a perspective on our individual experiences of objects. Once this distinction is not only thought of in sentience but also includes constructs of thought, concepts and the like, we maintain a “hidden world realism.” The thought here is that, although we cannot describe the world from other than our perspectives, some perspectives are more in accordance with the world than others. Its “realistic” account may be hard to spot since this position admits that we never can escape the fact that our thoughts upon the world – our conceptualisation etc. – arise from a perspective. The certainty of our knowledge may therefore be fallible, but at least in principle the true nature of reality could be known by minimizing the subjective perspective. “Hidden world realism” still believes that there is a nature that maintains its proposition regardless of our perspectives. A fairly similar position is found in “pseudo-Kantianism”:

All our experiences of the world are views of it as it appears from some particular perspective. And the only sorts of truths we are able to formulate about the world are truths from within such perspectival views of it. We should not mistake the limitations of our knowledge, imposed on us by our finite cognitive capacities, for limitations that are inherent in the nature of reality as such. The very idea that our experience is of the world (that appearances are appearances and not mere illusions) – i.e. that there is something which our descriptions are about – presupposes the further idea that there is a way the world is in itself apart from any merely perspectival view of it – a way the world is when “viewed from nowhere,” i.e., from no particular perspective (or, alternatively, from a God’s-eye perspective). Moreover, though such knowledge of the world (as it is in itself) is in principle unattainable for us, we are able to think what we cannot know: we are able to grasp in thought that there is such a way the world is, apart from the conditions under which we know it.\(^7\)

\(^6\) Conant, 2005, pp. 21.
\(^7\) Conant, 2005, pp 28-29. Italics in original. Conant names this position “pseudo-Kantianism” to convey that he is not inclined to think that Kant himself maintained such a position. Rather pseudo-Kantianism must be ascribed certain commentators of Kant. Description of this position does however shed light on how perspectivism could be understood, and in particular how an anti-realist account differs from a realist account, although the plausibility of its Kantian-anchor can be discussed. (For further outline of “pseudo-Kantianism” see Conant, 2005, pp. 28-32.)
In pseudo-Kantianism it is stated in the condition that a true knowledge of the world is never attainable. Our knowledge will always be knowledge of the world as it appears. Its overcoming of subjectivity lies in stating how the conditions must be ordered to make it possible for us to have appearances, while hidden-world perspectivism’s overcoming of subjectivity consists of minimizing the perspectives, thus allowing that “the most appropriate and reliable” counts as knowledge. True knowledge of reality of nature is therefore, at least in principle, attainable for the hidden-world perspectivist, while always unattainable for pseudo-Kantianism. Both positions, however, imply that there exists an external world, a world as it is in itself, independent of our perception of it. This is also what prevents pseudo-Kantianism from slipping into anti-realism and pay attention to the full strength of perspectivism.

After admitting that our experiences of the world necessarily take place within a perspective, there is no reason to hold on to an idea of an externally, perspective-independent world, a world as it is in itself. Though it sounds wise not to mistake our perceptions of the world for properties of the true nature of the world, as the pseudo-Kantian prescribes, an idea of such a world makes no sense. Thinking of the world “as it is in itself” would require a “view from nowhere,” and it makes no sense to speak of such a world since there is no place or perspective from which it could be conceived. What happens if we think the perspectivistic doctrine all the way through is that the age old conception of the perspective-independent world ceases to exist. For the perspectivist then, “[p]erspectives cease any longer to be perspectives on anything. All there turns out to be are perspectives and more perspectives.”

Central to Nietzsche’s perspectivism must therefore be the view that there exists no mind-independent reality but only a sphere of perspectives, appearances and aspects:

What is ‘appearance’ to me now! Certainly not the opposite of some essence – what could I say about any essence except name the predicates of its appearance! […] To me, appearance is the active and living itself, which goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that there is appearance and a will-o’-the-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing else.

---

8 Conant, 2005, pp. 32. My italics. The central line of argument in this last paragraph is deeply in debt to Conant; see Conant, 2005, especially pp. 30-34.

The passage makes it clear that *appearances* are “the active and living,” that is, what can be accounted for as the productive power or the creative force. This is best seen as opposed to the view that appearances are a product or an effect of “a world in itself.” In the latter view, appearances are merely re-presentations of something “more real” and thereby with the privilege of ontological priority, and as such appearances function as mirroring (more or less correctly) the objective reality. However, as we have seen, Nietzsche’s account offers a denial of this priority. “The reality” is not something over and above what we are capable of perceiving. Instead, reality is nothing more than our appearances and perspectives. In other words, reality is the “active and living itself” and thus the most fundamental structures of life. In this way ontological priority is given to appearances as opposed to the more traditional favouring of reality as something “out there.”

The perspectivist’s thesis implies an insistence of never-enclosedness: the topic that is investigated never reaches an end in the way that it is always open for further interpretations and other analysis. Perspectivism thus rules out the possibility of a totality of perspectives. Admittedly, Nietzsche describes a grasping and frequent production of “more perspectives” in positive terms, but that is not to say that a grasp of “all perspectives” is attainable. Such a view would be to “think an eye that cannot possibly be thought, an eye that must not have any direction, in which the active and interpretive forces through which seeing first becomes seeing-something are to be shut off, are to be absent; thus, what is demanded here is always an absurdity and non-concept of an eye.”

10 A view of “all perspectives” – a totality-perspective-view – would itself have no direction, no intention or interest and hence no means of taking action in life. Interpretation always demands a specific direction – having a project, looking for some things and not for others – thus an “all-absorbing-perspective” is an absurdity and an impossibility.

Important to the aspect of never-enclosedness is that it also counts for the investigating “subject”: the subject is likewise never an enclosed and accomplished interpreter. The autonomy of the subject is limited in the way that it is influenced by the

---

particularity of the situation. Hence the confrontation with the (interpreted) object *moves* or *changes* the subject, it brings something new into the (hermeneutical) interpretative *horizon*, thus the subject *gains* something, becomes *richer* through experience. The subject is nothing self-identical; through experience something is added, something is changed, thus the subject is not a stable, static interpreter, but a dynamic being, participating in life rather than merely perceiving it, as taking a step aside to have a better glance at the object conceived. The traditional view of interpretative action as a one-way direction, where an autonomous subject focuses on a topic or examines an object (we could say that the subject explores the objective reality), must be abandoned. What we can witness in Nietzsche’s perspectivism then is a hermeneutical movement where both objects and subjects interact.

Now, the task for the perspectivist is to become conscious of this rearrangement of ontological priority and realise that appearances are what provide essence. But what kind of substance could possibly be given in an epistemological theory that gives priority to appearances? Or, in other words, what kind of knowledge are we entitled to speak about from within a perspectivistic point of view? Is knowledge to be regarded as something merely arbitrary, open to the subject’s shifting moods and other external factors that condition how our interpretations are formed? Questions like these clearly need to be addressed to let perspectivism stand out as a justified epistemological position.

Now, questions regarding an undermining of the concept of knowledge would certainly be posed from epistemological realists, not sharing the anti-realist view upon the world. But (as will soon be shown) also anti-realists will find Nietzsche’s perspectivism indefensible. (This of course also indicates how unique and radical Nietzsche’s perspectivism is as an epistemological position.) It is therefore urgent for the perspectivist to be able to answer the questions stated above. However, before answers can be provided, a closer look at arbitrariness in Nietzsche’s philosophy is called for. In dealing with the issue I will first give an account of how a perspectivistic rejection of the problem of self-reference slips into the dangers of relativism, before dealing with the problem of arbitrariness in more detail.
The problem of self-reference
According to Nietzsche, one of the chief problems with the philosophical tradition is its caring for an objective and transparent conception of knowledge: “How we have made everything around us bright and free and easy and simple! How we have known how to bestow on our passport to everything superficial, on our thoughts a divine desire for wanton gambolling and false conclusions!”\(^{11}\) With the introduction of perspectivism such passé, doctrinal conceptions of knowledge are rejected. Our knowledge is achieved only against the background of aspects and perspectives, or in Nicholas Smith’s words; “[for Nietzsche] knowledge is either relative to the historically contingent point of view of the knower, or reducible to the acognitive, pre-discursive forces and mechanisms [will to power] that constitute that point of view.”\(^{12}\) By such Nietzsche avoids a doctrinal conception of knowledge as clear cut, independent and perspective-free access to reality. On the other hand, the statement seems to impose some ontological commitments; “if all we can know about reality depends on the perspective from which it is interpreted, must we not assume that reality itself can only be how it seems to us fallible interpreters?”\(^{13}\) In other words, does not Nietzsche advocate a shift in the epistemological paradigm, arguing that we must stop being preoccupied with an external, subject-independent reality and instead focus on our being-in-the-world, our ontological reality, seeing the necessity of perspectives intertwined with the conception of knowledge? Holding this would work as a critique of the philosophical tradition, but at the same time the perspectivist’s thesis that all views are interpretations – thus all views are value-laden and hence could have been different – seems violated. As such, holding the perspectivistic position does not seem compatible with the content of the perspectivist’s claims. Smith, however, argues that the perspectivist would denounce humility confronted with the question regarding ontological commitments:

\(^{11}\) Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 55.
\(^{13}\) Smith, 1997, pp. 16. Italics in original.
To call something ‘real’, [...] [the perspectivist] maintains, is not just to express one’s own particular perspective, it is also to make an honorific gesture about it. Thus while the gesture may be cognitively empty, it nevertheless serves a function: to privilege the claimant’s own perspective and to exclude others.\(^{14}\)

The point is not so much about cognitive content of the perspectivist’s expressions regarding reality, as the function it serves as subordinating organiser: the claimant’s own perspective is given priority faced with other, alternative interpretations. Now, the quest is certainly how a “rightful” subordinating is carried out; is it possible to give criteria of what should be given priority and what should be subordinated? Nietzsche attacks the naïve belief in “higher” values such as God, truth, the real and the good. Relinquishing such authorities makes it possible for Nietzsche to launch his own project of seeing differences as constituting force and creative activity as authority-giving power.\(^{15}\) The rejection of “higher” values certainly gives strength to the challenge of belief in a cognitive grasp of an objective order as traditional philosophy has it: conceiving something “objectively” amounts to absurdity if there is no intrinsically “good,” no “real,” nor “truth.” Through such transvaluing Nietzsche himself clearly serves a subordinating function (rejecting truth for untruth, identity for divergence, etc.) But, as Smith points out, “it is difficult to specify the source of this other norm,” and – to make the link to the problem of self-reference obvious – it is even harder to state the grounds for such a norm.\(^{16}\)

Central to Nietzsche’s philosophical project is the theme of a “reawakening of life.” Life itself should dominate our being-in-the-world, not some artificial and misguided search for truth and the good. Life should be allowed to unfold among us. Hence the source of Nietzsche’s alternative epistemological norm concerns an expression of life; divergences composing the world are expressed through creative actions; “a flux of sensuous particularity which resists the conceptual categorization conditioning claims to truth.”\(^{17}\) The claim of a “redirection of life” is not supported by other claims. In other words, it seems that perspectivism is not confronted with demands equalling those set up to the challenged position; Smith writes “[the expression of life] is arguably adventitious

\(^{15}\) These claims are developed in greater depth in chapter 2.
\(^{16}\) Smith, 1997, pp. 17.
\(^{17}\) Smith, 1997, pp. 17.
to the central challenge his [Nietzsche’s] opponents must address: is it necessary to reject the norm of truth and the ethic of cognition for another norm that is external and *antagonistic* to it, and which must be thought of as having ‘in itself no end’?18

A demand of a basic fundament for perspectivism would provoke a break with the position itself. The perspectivist proceeds to make space for differences, “flux of sensuous particularity,” creativity and transitoriness. There is neither need nor space for fundamentalism in this picture. Rather, the fault with former philosophy is the search for such infallible fundament: the search for truth for instance is clearly motivated by the desire for such fundament. The felt need of solving the many paradoxes in Nietzsche’s texts, the intolerance of the incommensurable and contradictive, and the whine of a lack of clarity in Nietzsche’s argumentation all springs from a belief in foundational standards. Such approaches do not grasp the perspectivist’s endorsement of diversity, heterogeneity and difference. According to Smith; the task of Nietzschean thought “is not the justification or clarification of difference, but, to borrow Derrida’s expression, the ‘intensification of its play.’”19

The problem of this outline of perspectivism is that it does not escape relativism. By downplaying cognitive, rational thinking and upholding creativity as an expression of life, we can say that cognition has been subordinated under ontological claims. However such de-rationalisation – the antipathy of giving any foundation or arguments for the rightness of the alternative norm (that life essentially expresses itself through creation) – functions to relativize all ontological claims.20 As long as argumentation starts off from the sphere of ontology, demands of supporting or founding reasoning can be rejected. Not only is the *divergence* in demands of instance in support of the actual positions striking; the concretisation and manifestation of ontological creation held by Nietzsche seems also to be a subjectivistic feature, arbitrary, relying on the claimant only. Hence, the problem of arbitrariness must be addressed if a perspectivistic reply to the problem of self-reference is to avoid slipping into dissatisfying relativism.

---
19 Smith, 1997, pp. 18.
20 This is also Smith’s point of view. See Smith, 1997, pp. 19.
The problem of arbitrariness

In his book of 1968, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, Jürgen Habermas makes a thorough exploration of the foundation and origin of what counts as “knowledge.” His conclusion seems to be that human interest plays a crucial part in that which comes to be regarded as “knowledge” – to put it in a nutshell. In the final chapter of this work Habermas explores how the link between knowledge and human interest can be found in the work of Freud as an opposition to Nietzsche’s account of knowledge. It is clear that Habermas has his own purposes for his usage of both Freud’s and Nietzsche’s critical projects, namely as a tool for stating Habermas’ own critical, philosophical position. However I will not go further into how successful Habermas is in this attempt, neither do I want to explore Habermas’ own position in further detail. On the other hand, Habermas’ interpretation of Nietzsche is of interest here by offering a sophisticated way of posing the epistemological problems with Nietzschean perspectivism from an anti-realist point of view. Habermas distinguishes Nietzsche’s position with a Freudian account of knowledge. Habermas’ reading of Freud is therefore used solely with the purpose of seeing how the Freudian concept of knowledge sheds light on the problems arising from Nietzsche’s perspectivism.

Commentators on Nietzsche have for a long time worked with possible rejections of the problem of arbitrariness and self-reference. At the end of this chapter I will outline one famous example of these – Alexander Nehamas’ response – and show why he does not succeed, before arguing in the next chapter for an interpretation that would show the inadequacy of the problems, hence adding coherence and strengthening Nietzsche’s perspectivism as an epistemological position.

Habermas’ Freud-interpretation

After arguing (against Nietzsche) that it is a misunderstanding to account for knowledge as constituted by human interest in mere psychological terms, and that “knowledge-constitutive interest [is] that [which] determine[s] the conditions of objectivity of the validity of statements [and that these conditions] are rational themselves,” Habermas

---

writes: “[Freud] defended it [the connection between knowledge and interest] against the psychologistic misunderstanding according to which this connection entails a subjectivistic devaluation of knowledge,” and continues; “[Nietzsche] saw the connection of knowledge and interest, but psychologized it, thus making it the basis of a metacritical dissolution of knowledge as such.” In these statements Habermas makes it explicit that he sees Nietzsche as “a psychologist” and it is plausible to draw the conclusion that Habermas reads Nietzsche’s perspectivism as a psychological or “psychologized way of reasoning.” Furthermore, such a “psychologized way of reasoning” seems to be fully arbitrary, relying on the autonomous subject only. But what leads Habermas to this interpretation of Nietzsche and how plausible is it? Before addressing those questions it is necessary to see how a successful combination of knowledge and interest can be carried out, according to Habermas, something which he finds within Freud’s work. In what follows I will therefore deal with Habermas’ reading of Freud.

In Freud’s social, critical theories, civilisation provides the frame of what is regarded as normality and abnormality, according to Habermas. So there is no place from where we can look to what is “naturally”-abnormal or “objectively”-abnormal from outside the frames that civilisation provides. Rather, that which comes to count as normal and abnormal is established of the shared standards which are accepted within the community. To draw the analogy with psychoanalysis, a pathological person is treated as pathological only in a society which judges such behaviour as pathological. But that does not give us any account for judging whether or not the society as a whole is in a pathological state, or as Habermas puts it:

If, however, what counts as a normal or deviant self-formative process can be defined only in accordance with the institutional framework of a society, then this society as a whole could itself be in a pathological state when compared with other cultures, even though it sets the standard of normality for the individual cases it subsumes.

---

The task Habermas then sets up is how Freud’s theory can provide an account of knowledge that does not lead to subjectivistic or communal arbitrariness. As a step of the refutation of the arbitrariness-theses it is necessary to look into how Freud thinks civilisation is originated:

The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one; since it does not possess enough provisions to keep its members alive unless they work, it must restrict the number of its members and divert their energies from sexual activity to work. It is faced, in short, by the eternal, primaeval exigencies of life, which are with us to this day.

The need for labour for the self-preservation of both the individual and the species is in other words the fundamental drive for the formation of the civilisation. But Habermas insists that the organisation of the work has two main purposes: one is that an organised community can sustain control over natural forces, prevent them from attacks from the community’s members and function as the distributor over the goods produced. This function Habermas labels “technical control.” The other function serves to lay restrictions on the relation between the members, because other people can be regarded as “a wealth” themselves, so far as “the other person makes use of his capacity for work, or chooses him as a sexual object.” Thus the latter function regulates the member’s interaction.

Now, with this account of the origin and organisation of the civilisation as a background layer, it is possible to approach the difficulties between human interest and objective knowledge. As long as the institutional framework enforces social norms it also produces series of “symptoms” which can be accounted for as unconscious mechanisms, caused by the very power of the social norms which the institutional framework provides, according to Habermas. It should be stressed that these symptoms emerge into existence precisely because they are not made subject to conscious control, but remain as hidden patterns within the society. Habermas holds that part of these symptoms “can be refashioned into

---

26 “Communal neuroses” is what a society suffers from if the whole community itself is in a ”pathological state.” A diagnose of such requires investigation that goes beyond the institutional framework, according to Habermas (Habermas, 2004, pp. 274). As used in the context above, “communalistic arbitrariness” must be understood as the situation where it is up to the community as a whole, alone to decide what should count as normal, abnormal, real, superficial – in short; that it is up to the community alone to make all value-judgments and thereby constitute what counts as “knowledge.”


legitimations for prevailing norms,” and that “[c]ollective fantasies compensate for the renunciations imposed by civilization.”29 The impact that such collective fantasies have, remains hidden, since – because they are collective and not subject to examination on an individual level – they are evaded in the field of critical investigations. Furthermore, Habermas is willing to call these collective fantasies “illusions”: “Freud calls this the ‘mental assets of civilization’: religious worldviews and rites, ideals and value systems, styles and products of art, the world of projective formations and objective appearances – in short, ‘illusions.’”30 Exactly the illusions that are examined here are going to play a crucial part in Habermas’ engagement of providing the link between interests and knowledge.

It is important to note that illusions should not be confused with pathological delusions. As Freud writes: “In the case of delusions, we emphasize as essential their being in contradiction with reality. Illusions need not necessarily be false – that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality.”31 As has been already stated, it is the society that provides the frames for that which can exist, and as such there is no other reality other than that within the civilisation. A delusion can be counted for as individual thoughts that are in discrepancy with the social norms. But how can “illusions” in Freud’s conception, be conceived as “collective fantasies” that compensate for the renunciations imposed by civilization, as a kind of “substitute-gratification” on behalf of the social norms that literally form the civilisation, without also happening to “contradict reality”?

Fantasies, whether individual or communal, are usually thought of as something beyond reality, and thereby as something unreal. However a different approach is needed to grasp the Freudian communal fantasies, since “illusions need not necessarily be false.” Although the frames that are created by civilisation are an immovable reality, the same boundaries do not apply to the species as a whole. Illusions rather express certain utopias of what is wanted in the community, but not achieved. However, Habermas holds that these utopias are able to be achieved by means of expanding the boundaries made up of civilisation. For instance; “[i]f technical progress opens up the objective possibility of reducing socially necessary repression below the level of institutionally demanded

29 Habermas, 2004, pp. 279.
repression, this utopian content can be freed from its fusion with the delusory.”

What Habermas does here is to provide a spring back to the origins of civilisation and offer a solution of how utopias can expend the framework of reality by being active in the motives and foundation of civilisation itself. As when the needs to work and to achieve control over natural resources are the motivations for the creation of civilisation, they are subject to the same work, but now more specifically by means of technical process. In other words; science, as a particular field of labour, is capable of expanding the boundaries of civilisation, motivated by communal fantasies or illusions. In this setup, science could also be seen as the provider of knowledge because it influences the creation of civilisation’s framework. That is, because it is the framework of the civilisation that defines what is true – and thus what should count as knowledge – and since science has impact on this framework, science must also be seen as a provider of knowledge.

Now, Habermas distinguishes two kinds of science with slightly different applications and consequences in the Freudian picture. In natural sciences nature becomes the object of knowledge from the viewpoint of technical control, while cultural sciences are centred on communication and the possibility of establishing intersubjectivity and mutual understanding. He then writes: “Because they [the sciences] mirror structures of work and interaction, in other words, structures of life, we have conceived of these two transcendental viewpoints as the cognitive expression of knowledge-constitutive interests.” It should be stressed that these are “transcendental viewpoints” which means that moving on the transcendental level both of technical control and of communication, it establishes the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Or more precisely, the transcendentality of natural and cultural sciences makes us see that it is technical control and mutual understanding that are the objects from where we can gather knowledge.

The reason that science can achieve this transcendental role is that it is essentially self-reflexive. Habermas describes the self-reflexive process through an example of psychoanalysis:

---

33 Habermas, 2004, pp. 286.
Here the process of inquiry, which is at the same time a process of self-inquiry, is bound to the conditions of analytic dialogue. These conditions are transcendental insofar as they establish the meaning of the validity of psychoanalytic interpretations. Yet at the same time they are objective insofar as they make possible the factual treatment of pathological phenomena.\textsuperscript{34}

The same can be said about the role of science in general. The inquiry in which science engages, produces knowledge by means of technical control over nature and valid, intersubjective, mutual understanding, as stated above. This process is at the same time self-reflexive in the way that it simultaneously explores the boundaries of its own application, and thus sets up the conditions for its analytic activity. The boundaries are explored through the philosophy of science which makes it clear that civilisation, where science is a part, sets the framework for what can be accounted as knowledge. The conditions for its analytic activity are transcendental because science itself provides the meaning of what counts as valid for scientific examinations. Although different subjects in different sciences provide their own transcendental conditions, the general point is that science as a whole has the capacity – through its self-reflexiveness – to provide the meaning of its own interpretation. Furthermore, the interpretations offered by science are also objective in the sense that they make possible the factual treatment of the phenomena they deal with. This is what Habermas has in mind when he writes that “[w]e have ascertained the structures of work, language and power not naively but through the self-reflection of knowledge, beginning with the philosophy of science, entering the transcendental dimension, and finally becoming aware of its objective context.”\textsuperscript{35}

This helps to illuminate the link between knowledge and interest. First of all it is not possible to establish any kind of interest as primary to that of reason, since all interest already requires a portion of interpretation. Habermas writes: “At the human level we never encounter any needs that are not already interpreted linguistically and symbolically affixed to potential actions,” and he continues “[t]he interest of self-preservation proceeds in accordance with the interest of reason.”\textsuperscript{36} Now, since human life is subjected to that of work so as to gain technical control over nature and social interaction, the “interest” peculiar to reason cannot be accounted for without taking these cultural factors into consideration. Interest in self-preservation, and thus of life, is not something autonomous,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] Habermas, 2004, pp. 287.
\end{footnotes}
primordial to reason since to have an interest in self-preservation already is to have an account of what life is. Furthermore we orient ourselves not only to the “life” but to the “good life,” according to Habermas. He holds that “the good” is fundamentally a fantasy or, more precisely, the result of a fantasy that must be “fantasied so exactly that it corresponds to and articulates a fundamental interest: The interest […] that historically is objectively possible under given and manipulable conditions.”

Now it has become clear that science is capable of illuminating such conditions by standing out as the institutionalised provider of critique. Through its analytic activity science shows that interest is not something external to knowledge. That would be a viewpoint that Habermas would regard as a “misunderstanding in terms of naturalism.” Instead it must be clear that since human life directs itself against self-preservation, it is directed against the “functional condition of work and interaction” so that interest and reason cannot be separated in those functions. Instead science, as the institutionalised process of making fantasies part of civilisation’s framework, can illuminate “knowledge-constitutive interest” as an interest of self-preservation that must be conceived as “interest that operates through reason itself.”

**Habermas’ Nietzsche-interpretation**

According to Habermas, Nietzsche saw the connection between knowledge and interest but used it to criticise knowledge as such. In Habermas’ reading Nietzsche’s critique of science does not only rely on the assumption that science is somehow wrong or false in its predictions. Science’s fault as an institution in the modern society is also that it is incapable of keeping our interest and thus no longer serves life. Habermas uses the example of historicism and writes:

Nietzsche does not yet perceive that objectivism is a false scientific self-understanding. Instead he accepts it as the necessary implication of historical science itself. Hence Nietzsche believes that a history “in the service of life” requires a pre-scientific attachment to the unhistorical and transhistorical.
In other words, the “scientism” of science is not sufficient to legitimise it. To tie it to the Habermasian context, this justification is lacking when it becomes clear that our knowledge-seeking is founded on self-preservation. When a subject is scientizised it is rationalised through the process of action and “action-orienting belief systems.” Thus science has the ability to show the incredibility of former *metaphysical* beliefs and interpretations. But Nietzsche holds, that science itself does not fill the vacuum that former interpretations left behind. Instead science is to be regarded as purely technical and thus cannot guide any action. Nietzsche writes: “Science explains the course of nature, but can never give man commands. Inclintaion, love, pleasure, pain, exaltation, exhaustion – science knows nothing of all this. What man lives and experiences he must *interpret*, and thus evaluate, on some basis.”

This is what Habermas has in mind when he says that Nietzsche criticises science for no longer serving life. Furthermore Habermas sees this as a critical engagement with science which *could* be regarded as a fruitful path to follow, since science itself needs to be self-reflexive in the Freudian sense to be successful. But Nietzsche uses this “dissolution of dogmas” not for producing liberation but indifference and as such the critique turns out ultimately nihilistic. With the abolishment of science as the method for providing knowledge, we are left with a “pre-scientific” methodological vocabulary where the mutual understanding is not secured because of the lack of self-reflection. Thus our interpretations turn out ultimately subjectivistic and arbitrary. In Habermas’ reading, Nietzsche rightly sees the connection between interest and knowledge when agreeing that self-preservation is playing a fundamental role in our knowledge-constitution. In opposition to Freud however, Nietzsche claims that although science has achieved a monopoly of knowledge, it has lost our interest because it does not connect to life anymore. Accordingly, science has turned out as something merely technical, unable to fill the vacuum provoked by the refutation of former pre-scientific interpretations. Where Freud sees the work of science as ultimately providing means of self-preservation while giving an account for the link between knowledge and interest, Nietzsche claims that science no longer serves life since it has become too technical to grasp its true ingredients i.e. “inclination,” “love,”

---

“pleasure,” “pain,” “exaltation,” “exhaustion.” Even more, a critical engagement with science can be favourable if it contributes to illuminating the conditions for how our knowledge is produced. But Nietzsche does exactly the opposite of this and uses his insight to refute the concept of knowledge and adapt a nihilistic position where “truth” is seen as a relativistic proposition and objective knowledge is never to be achieved.

Habermas quotes Nietzsche’s remarks on our cognitive apparatus. In book two of *the Gay Science*, Nietzsche claims that our cognitive apparatus is not directed at providing knowledge. Rather it is developed in such a way that it is suitable for making simplifications of our surroundings and by this providing means of self-preservation, or in Nietzsche’s words “the control of things.” The outcome of such control (“the end”) is “as far from the essence as are concepts,” according to Nietzsche. By setting up what counts as “the end” it is possible to control the process (the interaction of things, causality, etc.) while the “concepts” enable us to create the things, that is, setting up the standards of what “a thing” is, what it consists of, etc. By this, nature is put under concepts to secure preservation of life. Nietzsche goes on to claim that

> [t]his compulsion to form concepts, genera, forms, ends, and laws (‘one world of identical cases’) should not be understood as though we were capable through them of ascertaining the true world, but rather as the compulsion to adapt to ourselves a world in which our existence is made possible. Thereby we create a world that is calculable, simplified, understandable, etc., for us.

Habermas says that “[t]his sentence could be understood along the lines of a transcendental-logically conceived pragmatism.” By such Nietzsche would be claiming that although knowledge conceived of as objective and universal regardless of cognitive capacities, must be abandoned, the task is to establish the conditions that function for our ability to perceive the world, that is, what knowledge is for us. Still this position would remain critical to the monopoly of modern science since it could be other, pre-scientific or metaphysical conceptions of how these conditions were to be fixed. “This,” Habermas remarks, “is obviously not Nietzsche’s view.” He uses the insight rather to criticize the

---

45 Nietzsche, quoted in Habermas, 2004, pp. 296.
46 Habermas, 2004, pp. 296.
47 Habermas, 2004, pp. 296.
idea that there exists anything like objectivity and remarks that “[o]ur cognitive apparatus is not organized for ‘knowledge.’” In Habermas’ interpretation then, Nietzsche’s acknowledgement of the connection between knowledge and interest leads rightly to the rejection of a common-sense conception of knowledge, but only to be falsely replaced with a subjectivistic conception. As stated before, this conception has no means of establishing mutual understanding, and with this lack of capacity it is unable to provide valid, intersubjective knowledge.

Following Habermas, it is after this preparatory work that Nietzsche introduces his perspectivism. And Habermas makes clear that the perspectivistic position could never be attained if it were not already assumed that knowledge was unobtainable. By this means, perspectivism is not to be considered as an epistemological position at all: “From this Nietzsche draws the conclusion that the theory of knowledge now has to be replaced by a doctrine of perspectives based on the affects. Nevertheless, it is easy to see that Nietzsche would never have arrived at perspectivism if from the very beginning he had not rejected epistemology as impossible.” Rather, perspectivism functions as the devaluation of scientific knowledge and the dissolution of meaning and understanding to the advantage of merely arbitrary worldview.

The arrival of a subjectivistic concept of “knowledge” is only reached by a fundamental misunderstanding of knowledge-constitutive interest, Habermas states. The misunderstanding consists in taking the matter of science’s self-reflection as critique. The following statement of Nietzsche is instructive in this respect:

One would have to know … what certainty is, what knowledge is, and so forth. But since we do not know this, a critique of the cognitive faculty is absurd. How could the instrument criticize itself, if it can use only itself for this critique? It cannot even define itself.

Instead of seeing how self-reflection is capable of providing the meaning of modern science’s terminology, and at the same time seeing the limits of its own inquiries, that is, remaining aware of the framework of possible knowledge and thus achieve a conception

---

49 Habermas, 2004, pp. 298.
50 Habermas, 2004, pp. 298.
51 Nietzsche, quoted in Habermas, 2004, pp. 298. This is equalent to Hegel’s critique of Kant, something also Habermas remarks.
of what knowledge is (as in Freud’s account), Nietzsche thought that the limitation of a self-reflective praxis led to the refutation of knowledge as such.

Even though Nietzsche repeatedly claimed that he was going to fight the nihilistic attitudes in his time, he turns out to be the ultimate nihilist himself in Habermas’ reading. While Freud used the insight of the intertwining of knowledge and interest to settle the conditions of how our knowledge is built up, Nietzsche’s insight into the same phenomenon reduces knowledge to something subjective and arbitrary, unable to satisfy criteria of valid, mutual understanding. As I said in the outset, the purpose of this section is only to use Habermas to help us see how the problem of arbitrariness emerges from an anti-realist’s position. Through the descriptions of the problem offered so far, it should be clear that the claim of arbitrariness and self-reference constitute serious problems to Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, many commentators on Nietzsche have tried to resolve these problems, more or less successfully. In the following I will engage with Nehamas’ influential interpretation of Nietzsche and focus on how he thinks the problem of arbitrariness can be addressed.

**Nehamas’ response**

In his book, *Nietzsche: Life as literature*, Nehamas aims to show that objecting against Nietzsche’s perspectivism – assuming that subjects thought of in light of this position become merely arbitrary – can be refuted. According to Nehamas it is crucial that we do not take our perspectives, that is, our interpretations of the world, to be merely an interpretation. To make the arbitrariness-argument work this assumption has to be made, and according to Nehamas, it is this assumption that lays the ground for the problems regarding self-reference as well. But, Nehamas argues, to regard our interpretative work as merely interpretations is to misunderstand Nietzsche’s perspectivism fundamentally.52

---

The arbitrariness thesis

Nehamas describes Nietzsche’s perspectivism regarding truth, with the analogy of a child’s concern with a toy: a toy is not merely a representation but reality to a child; while playing, a child’s intercourse with its toy is an absolutely serious relationship with no room for distance or irony. In this way the child treats its toy as “a real thing”; for instance dolls are transformed into real agents in a game. Without a sincere approach to a game, the game itself would not actually work. Instead the game would vanish as such if we were treating it as merely a game while also participating in it. For instance, playing football would lose its very meaning if one didn’t really care about getting the ball in the goal. Now, Nehamas’ point is that our “truths” – and thereby our “knowledge” – must be treated in the same way. In our concern with what we regard as “truth,” we are not allowed to approach it as being merely a truth, based on which perspective we inhabit. Instead it is possible to be aware of the reflection that our “truths” are linked to what perspective we inhabit, while taking the “truths” sincerely in our engagement with them.\(^{53}\) Moreover it is necessary to regard our “truths” sincerely, even though they should also be regarded as interpretations – that is perspectives – according to Nehamas. When Habermas read Nietzsche’s attacks on our concept of “knowledge” as a rejection of knowledge as valid, mutual understanding, and thereby with “knowledge” as relativistic and arbitrary, Nehamas would have disagreed. In Nehamas’ account Nietzsche’s attacks on “knowledge” consist in refuting a naïve conception of it as “objective” or as “in accordance with reality.” Knowledge and truth must instead be seen as a product of interpretation. But if “knowledge” is just an interpretation of the world, it must rely on the subjects that offer such interpretations. It is hard to see then, how Nietzsche’s perspectivism can avoid being anything but an arbitrary epistemological position. Nehamas thinks that this sort of objection exactly overlooks the difference between an “interpretation” and a “mere interpretation”:

---

\(^{53}\) Nehamas, 2002, pp. 57-59.
The argument is sometimes made that a reading is ‘only’ or ‘merely’ an interpretation because an alternative could, in principle, always be devised. But this challenge is serious only if a better alternative is in fact devised, and in most cases this is not at all a simple task. The new alternative must be, according to some set of criteria, at least as satisfactory as the view it challenges. If it shows that the previous reading was ‘merely’ an interpretation, the new reading cannot be characterized as a ‘mere’ interpretation in turn until yet another, still better interpretation is produced.54

Nehamas’ view is that the arbitrary-argument does not work only by arguing that any reading or any truth is an interpretation. On the other hand, if our truths were merely an interpretation the case would be different. In that case, our interpretations – which count as our perspectives in Nehamas’ account – would be absolutely relativistic in the sense that any individual would stand free to make her own interpretations of the world, and that every interpretation would be as valid as any other. But, Nehamas argues, this is not an assumption inclined by the perspectivist. Our prevailing views, our knowledge, cannot be treated merely as interpretations. If we take a view to be a mere interpretation it will necessarily have to be refuted. Since the contemporary view is never refuted (because it would then lose its status as the contemporary) it can never be treated as a mere interpretation:

The general problem with both positive and negative approaches to perspectivism so far is that they have been too quick to equate possible with actual falsehood, interpretation with mere interpretation. The claim, however, that a view is mere interpretation can be made only in light of a further interpretation, which is of course not a mere interpretation itself in that context.55

Nehamas states here what he sees as the chief reason for misinterpreting Nietzsche’s perspectivism. In another passage he states that “[t]o recognize […] the necessity of illusion is not to realize that everything is false and that the only thing one can do is to produce more and more ‘mere’ illusions and interpretations for their own sake. Illusions are difficult to construct, to accept, and to abandon.”56 It could be fruitful to approach Nehamas’ position with the account of Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigms: In Kuhn’s philosophy of science the “normal science” is taking place under certain underlying assumptions. These can be explicit or inexplicit questions that the specific type of science wants addressed, theories that are taken for granted or other basic assumptions. Together

54 Nehamas, 2002, pp. 63.
56 Nehamas, 2002, pp. 61.
such assumptions make up the paradigms under which science proceeds. When the sciences are stuck with too many unsolved problems that cannot be explained under the contemporary paradigm, the underlying, basic assumptions are themselves set under critique, from where a new paradigm can develop. Kuhn calls this process a shift of paradigm. The point to be made is that a refutation of an old paradigm requires that a new paradigm develops, that is, that we maintain another foothold or standpoint from where we can criticise the former paradigm.\textsuperscript{57} Similarly, it is only from “another foothold” that former knowledge and former “truths” can be seen as mere interpretations in Nietzschean terms. Through self-reflectivity it is still possible to see that the contemporary science has its own “basic assumptions” and thereby its own perspective or interpretation, but Nehamas stresses that these cannot be regarded as \textit{mere} interpretations. That is because a refutation of a view always requires “another foothold” – a place from where a critique of the paradigm can be made. Hence “\textit{mere} interpretations” can only be interpretations that have been refuted (in accordance to Nehamas’ terminology) while “interpretation” is an appropriate term for our contemporary views. Nehamas stresses that these views cannot be taken as merely interpretations. Instead they will have to be dealt with in a sincere manner, being the best explanations available. Treating our contemporary knowledge with distance and irony is impossible because of the lack of another foothold. For Nehamas then, it is possible to remain conscious that our contemporary knowledge is interpretation – like a toy for the child – and remain sincere with the engagement with it.

Nehamas believes that we cannot think of a world, a thing or an essence without interpreting it.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore there is no reality behind interpretation at all. In Nietzsche’s perspectivism, interpretation is rather what the world consists of, according to Nehamas. It is therefore not a mistake to consider our knowledge as interpretation either. The mistake committed by the ones that advocate the problem of arbitrariness is that they think of perspectivistic knowledge as mere interpretation.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Kuhn’s theory of scientific progress is found in \textit{The structure of scientific revolutions}. The reader is referred to the original work for a detailed account of Kuhn’s thoughts. Kuhn, Thomas S., \textit{The structure of scientific revolutions}, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962.

\textsuperscript{58} Nehamas, 2002, chapter 2 ”Untruth as a Condition of Life,” pp. 42-73.

\textsuperscript{59} Nehamas, 2002, pp. 66-67.
It could be objected that even though Nehamas provides plausible arguments for why our contemporary knowledge should not be treated as mere interpretations, he does not address the fact that many of our contemporary views diverge in their explanation of the same phenomenon. In other words, even though we are all located in a contemporary, modern context (and for the simplicity of the argument let us say within the same paradigm) it does not prevent us from disagreeing with each other, giving different explanations of phenomena, judging differently in moral issues, and the like. It seems that interpretation is a subjective matter after all then. Nehamas’ reply would immediately be positive: yes, interpretation is an individual matter, relying on subjective beliefs, but these beliefs can no more be taken as mere interpretations. The stress of the sincere treatment of our contemporary interpretations also applies to the individual level. A treatment of our own views as mere interpretation would not only be unfair, it would also be impossible since it would require another foothold and thereby lose its status as contemporary. In other words, the objection that it is up to the subject to pose more and more highhanded interpretations on a topic, is repudiated by the fact that the individual, contemporary view must also be treated sincerely.

There is however a deeper objection against Nehamas, claiming that Nehamas’ account does not really escape the problems that the claim of arbitrariness poses. Thus, the problem with Nehamas’ account is that it is not so much incorrect as incomplete: even though interpretations are “difficult to construct, to accept, and to abandon” it is hard to see how that provides a justification for the present interpretation. That an interpretation is hard to make does not necessarily make it justified.\(^6\) Clearly, Nehamas thinks that an interpretation is justified because of its factual state. According to Nehamas there is no other interpretation available for an individual than the contemporary. This may very well be so, but it still lacks a justification for why the interpretation has been made in one way rather than another. The argument of the problem of arbitrariness as outlined above simply remains to be dealt with. Nehamas offers a successful explanation of why perspectives and interpretation should not be dealt with as just any interpretation. (It can only be non-contemporary interpretations that can be taken as mere

\(^6\) McNeill made this statement in his lectures on On the Genealogy of Morality at the University of Essex, autum 2005.
interpretations. The others have to be taken sincerely.) But we are still left with no account of why the content of the interpretation has to be the way it is. Furthermore, with no explanation of how the interpretations we make up are actually created, they fall under the danger of arbitrariness. Since no conditions for how our interpretations come in to being are given, it seems like it is arbitrary what those interpretations are like.

The problem of self-reference

Nehamas tries to resolve the problem concerning self-reference in much the same way as he approached the problem of arbitrariness. He describes the problem of self-reference in the following way:

Suppose that we characterize Nietzsche’s perspectivism as the thesis (P) that every view is an interpretation. Now it appears that if (P) is true, and if every view is in fact an interpretation, this would apply to (P) itself. In that case (P) also turns out to be an interpretation. But if this is so, then not every view need be an interpretation, and (P) seems to have refuted itself.\(^61\)

Nehamas then goes on to address the problem:

If (P) is an interpretation, it may indeed be false. But from the possibility that (P), the thesis that every view is an interpretation, may be false, all that follows is the conclusion I have already stated – that is, that not every view necessarily is an interpretation. But (P) does not assert that every view necessarily is an interpretation; it can not therefore be refuted by showing (which is all I have done so far) that it is possible that some views are not interpretations. To show that (P) is false, we must show that some views are actually not interpretations. But this involves showing not that (P) may be false (which is again what has been shown up to this point) but that it is actually false.\(^62\)

Again, the confusion of the advocates of the problem of self-reference consists in taking interpretations as merely interpretations, according to Nehamas. He admits that perspectivism can be false, since it is an interpretation. But it does not follow from this that it must be refuted. All that is implied by the problem is that perspectivism might – that is, open for the possibility – of being false. But perspectivism as an epistemological position does not state anything about certainty, says Nehamas. So it cannot be objected that the possibility of perspectivism being false undermines the perspectivistic position. Only if perspectivism itself can be refuted as actually false, the problem of self-reference

\(^{61}\) Nehamas, 2002, pp. 66.
seems to apply, (even though the problem of self-reference would be somehow superficial then, since it is shown that perspectivism is false already in the first place). The fallacy lies in regarding perspectivism as a mere interpretation, as something that could just as well be different. With the distinction between “mere interpretation” and “interpretation,” Nehamas admits that perspectivism is an interpretation but that it cannot “just as well” be different, that is, that it is not a mere interpretation. In Nehamas’ account, a refutation of the perspectivistic position must show that something is not actually an interpretation, thus a factual rejection of the perspectivistic thesis itself.

How plausible is this argument? Originally Nehamas poses the problem of self-reference similarly to this: (1) If every view is an interpretation, (2) any interpretation may be false. (3) If perspectivism itself is a view, it follows (4) that perspectivism may be false. (5) Now, if perspectivism may be false it cannot justify why perspectivism is the right position to take in opposition to any other epistemological position, for instance epistemological realism.

In his rejection of the problem, Nehamas imports modal distinctions between “is possible,” “is necessary” and “is actually” -the case. Hales and Welshon are critical of this procedure of Nehamas’ rejection and in their book *Nietzsche’s perspectivism* they write:

Nehamas introduces modality […] in which he claims that if the strong perspectivism thesis applies to itself, “then not every view need be an interpretation.” This clause is ambiguous between “not every view is an interpretation” and “possible not every view is an interpretation.” Given Nehamas subsequent claims, he requires it to be “possible not every view is an interpretation.” However, consider an interpretation of […] sans modality. It reads as: “[…] If P is an interpretation, then it is not the case that, given any proposition, if it is a view, then it is an interpretation.” Surly it is this view that needs refuting, for it is this claim that entails that there are propositions that are views and not interpretation, and thus contradicts thesis P. Yet Nehamas goes on to attack […] [that “possible not every view is an interpretation”] instead.⁶³

Hales and Welshon point out that Nehamas, in addressing the problem of self-reference, changes the premises of the problem, and so ends up refuting something that was not the original problem. This clearly undermines Nehamas’ attempt to address the problem of self-reference.

---

Nehamas has given a sound account of why perspectivism as a position and the claims the perspectivist holds should not be regarded “merely interpretations.” Interpretations cannot be shifted, replaced, shuffled or randomly attributed since this would undermine our sincere relation to our own perspectives. Judging an aspect as a mere interpretation or treating a perspective with distance and irony implies that the critique is launched from another foothold. As shown, a critique of our contemporary view becomes impossible since, for a critique to be carried out, it must originate in something that is not the criticised position. Interpretations then should not be rendered arbitrary, in the meaning; attributed randomly, shifted as we please in order to apply different situations. On the other hand, this account does not respond to the problem of arbitrariness as outlined earlier. For even though we remain sincere to the perspectives and interpretations we produce, Nehamas gives no account for the justification in holding such views. What makes me justified in holding x cannot merely be that I believe x sincerely. Moreover, stressing that our interpretations do not come easily but are hard to “construct, to accept, and to abandon,” does not render this not being a purely subjectivistic feature, unable of establishing mutual understanding. Digging deeper into this topic we shall see in the next chapters how the problem originates in different contexts and thereby produces different implications.
Chapter 2: Arbitrariness as external problem

The problems of arbitrariness and self-reference could be understood both as immanent problems that arise from within the context of Nietzsche’s thoughts, and as problems posed from outside the perspectivistic sphere, as external problems to his philosophy. An account of both positions must be given to offer an adequate understanding and possible responses to the problems. This chapter will deal with the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference understood as external problems.

Gilles Deleuze emphasises Nietzsche’s concept of “the eternal return” as the central concept for grasping his philosophical thoughts. In the following I will look into Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche to see how the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference could be seen as externally posed questions, and, consequently, how the Deleuzian understanding of perspectivism provides a plausible reply to the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference. For Deleuze, the eternal return represents the one conception from where all other concepts derive their meaning and make a coherent whole. This does not mean that other concepts such as “the will to power” or the “Overman” is of less importance. They are, on the contrary, necessary to grasp to arrive at a coherent conception of the eternal return. As such, the different concepts are equally important to understand for grasping the depth and the wholeness of Nietzsche’s philosophy. But what does the concept of eternal return mean? What is its content?

In providing answers to these questions we will touch upon concepts regarding Nietzsche’s ontology. The claim here is that a thought of entities as essentially becoming must be embraced at the cost of the former hegemonic view that entities are stable, self-identical beings. I will thereby turn to acts of interpretation which I consider instances or manifestations of underlying ontology, and argue that the problem of arbitrariness posed from an external point of view does not pay attention to this ontology, thus does not constitute a problem for perspectivism as an epistemological position.
Although Nietzsche opposes and accuses former metaphysics of being obsessed with “false” values, searching truth, the good and the virtuous, he does not reject every form of validity. The last part of the chapter will therefore consider and explain how aesthetics function as a normative ideal, fulfilling demands of validity in Nietzsche’s ontology.

**Becoming as ontological reality: the eternal return**

In Deleuze’s opinion the eternal return connects with a description of life as a living, organic being built up of forces with the capacity of interrelating and separating. Thus, life and the world is not composed of homogenic identities, as when a structure of many stones (many composites, thus homogenic identities) makes up a construction (say a pyramid). Rather life is a flux of differences, making heterogeneity and divergences the essential elements. To make sense out of these highly abstract claims it is important that we do not look upon life as something static, ready made, already constituted “out there” ready to be interpreted. For Nietzsche it is not that which is that is primary for understanding life and the world, but rather that which becomes: becoming is given priority over being. Deleuze writes:

[T]he selection of being which constitutes Nietzsche’s ontology [can be stated as follows]: only that which becomes in the fullest sense of the word can return, is fit to return. Only action and affirmation return: becoming has being and only becoming has being. That which is opposed to becoming, the same or the identical, strictly speaking, is not. The negative as the lowest degree of power, the reactive as the lowest degree of force, do not return because they are the opposite of becoming and only becoming has being. We can thus see how the eternal return is linked, not to a repetition of the same, but on the contrary, to a transmutation. It is the moment or the eternity of becoming which eliminates all that resists it.64

We are led to considerations on a metaphysical level in the quoted passage. Deleuze distinguishes “being” from “becoming” and argues that only becoming or that which becomes is fit to return, and thus undergo the process of the eternal return. Now, what are the concrete manifestations of this? How would such a process turn out? Deleuze’s aim is to establish a fundamental level in Nietzsche’s thinking where the possibility of being is founded. Thus conditions for being are in question, but conditions do not make themselves concrete or manifest; hence conditions for being cannot be the outcome of the

---

process of the eternal return. What is it then, that returns? The discussion of this is purely and primarily theoretic in Deleuze; thus the quest becomes; what can possibly return if the state of becoming is primary for all beings?

If we think of it, it looks like only that which truly is can return; since that which becomes never previously has existed, it seems a logical impossibility for the not-yet-existing to return. For something to return, it is thought, it must once have taken place (for events and the like) or existed (for objects). If, for instance, one were to be born again and repeat one’s life, getting the same education, having the same friends and marriage, etc., one would have been born at least once before, if not we cannot talk intelligibly of a return. Hence we can state at least one condition to undergo the process of the eternal return; the returning object must preliminarily have existed or be presently existing. But thinking in such terms is a danger that Deleuze strongly opposes:

We misinterpret the expression “eternal return” if we understand it as “return of the same.” It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes. It is not some one thing which returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. In other words, identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs.65

“The returning thing” is not an object. What is grasped by the concept is rather a process. “The eternal return” describes a process where only that which becomes can return. In opposition of seeing the existing (being) object as the only possible object for returning, we must understand that it is becoming itself, as a process of creation, that is fit to return. This means that things must be directed towards the future, towards something it can become that can undergo the process of the eternal return. In other words, if one leads one’s life in conformity, adopting its parent’s behaviour for instance, incorporating the norms of the society, undertaking moral judgements without reflection and the like, one would be a static being as opposed to a dynamic and becoming self. Now, what makes a becoming self fit to “eternally return”?

---

65 Deleuze, 2005, pp. 48.
The world as a flux of forces: the will to power

As shown in chapter 1, a realist account of perspectivism is premised on the idea of an external world independent of our perspectives. The task for the epistemologist in such a world-view must be to find out what it is that counts as most essential in the world, that is, what is the most substantial essence, what is the core and what are attributes in objects in the world and so on. In order to do so, the epistemologist must find the most reliable perspective on things, correct the distortions that may be a feature of merely human experience of the objects, etc. On the contrary Nietzsche believes that it is not the essence, the core or the identity of a thing that make up what a thing is. Rather, he claims, “a thing” consists of differences. Not identities but differences structures the world, that is, constructs of disparity and divergence. It is not the redness of a thing that makes it red but the opposition to green, yellow, blue and all other colours. The more we look upon an object in detail (say, the colour red) the more we see how nuanced the differences that compose it are (the differences between the light-waves that composes the colour, the span in the frequency inside one single light-wave, etc., etc.). This leads to the conclusion that life and the world in general is a multiplicity of forces of difference.

By such Nietzsche offers an alternative ontology, breaking radically with former conceptions. The world no longer consists of colliding identities, any essentiality of beings must be abandoned together with a conception of subjects as being self-identical and static. In Nietzsche everything is directed towards the future, thus what-it-is-not-yet; the world is transitory, essentiality is abandoned and subjects are dynamic and changeable (opposed to conform and essential). Nietzsche’s philosophy is directed towards life and everything that composes it is seen as becoming, not as something stable and essentially being.

Not everyone is convinced by the integrity of this alternative ontology: even if one accepts the conclusion that differences are composing objects in the world (as in the example of colours) one might bite the bullet and ask “– but do the differences not presuppose the existence of identities? For the colour red to diverge from another colour,

---

66 This is of course a conventional way of thinking upon epistemology. The fundamental line of argument goes: for an epistemology to exist, an ontology must be presupposed. To establish a theory of how we are capable of having knowledge there must be something existing that we can have knowledge of. This something is established by ontology. Thus, ontology functions as a condition for epistemology.
say yellow, must not yellow exist as an identity to make any divergence intelligible? What is all this talk of divergences without any account of identities?"

Although convincing at first glance, these objections have not grasped the fundamental substance in Nietzsche’s ontology of entities as composed of differences. The problem involved with taking identities of things for granted illuminates when one asks about the content of the “necessarily” presupposed identity of yellow as diverging from red. What is it that yellow is in itself, without reference to other colours? What is yellowness if not a contrast to red (as one among many other contrasts)? For Nietzsche, the point is that entities (people, colours, cats and cars) are nothing in themselves, but that they are constituted of what they are not. In a macro-level then, “yellow” is constituted by its divergence from red, orange and the like and a human being from its divergence from its parents, the clothes it is wearing and the streets it walks, among others. In a micro-level, yellow must be accounted for as the span in frequencies of the light-waves, humans, partly, as the divergence and combinations of blood-cells, brain-cells, proteins and neuro-physiological patterns.

Deleuze calls the composing divergences – the multiplicity of forces – “will to power.” The world as will to power must hence be understood as a world of multiplicity, a world of forces of difference that creates new entities and destroys old ones, a world of forces that make up components in the world by interacting and engaging. For Deleuze, will to power therefore expresses something radically different from those who interpret the expression as a contingent fact about the human mind, as an intentional willing. In the latter account Nietzsche is taken to offer psychological insights, rendering a search for power – that is commanding instead of being commanded, obey and rule instead of obeying and being ruled – as a primary state of being. Hence Nietzsche stands out as the “philosopher of the will” rendering also the moral and normative sphere to a matter of power. By such, Nietzsche is taken to be a sophisticated version of the theses that “big fish eat small fish with as much right as it has power.” Any normative judgement reflects, in this account, a relation of power, where an agent is just as justified in her actions as the power she possesses. Deleuze has something entirely different in mind; will to power is not any psychological or intentional state, but an ontological claim about the world. Will
to power is now taken to constitute the relation of the plurality of forces in the world. Karl Jaspers (a philosopher from whom Deleuze was clearly inspired) expressed this by pointing out Nietzsche’s perspectivism as distinct from Kantian transcendentalism:

Finally, Nietzsche’s metaphysics is characterized by the fact that it definitely relates to this world merely, and to no other. For him there is no transcendental reality. He wishes to do away with the age-old distinction between an underlying reality and its superficial appearances (between the true and the merely phenomenal world). For him there is only the world itself: nothing exists in addition to the “will to power” which alone, in its various forms, constitutes our world.⁶⁷

In the passage Jaspers points out the incredibility of upholding a distinction between the apparent world and the world-in-itself. In correspondence with the discussion in chapter 1, perspectivism renders out any talk of any outer, “objective” world; there is nothing but perspectives; the apparent world is the only world. Interestingly this world is referred to as the will to power, moreover; “nothing exists” but “the will to power,” hence; will to power “constitutes our world.” Everything is therefore constituted by the will to power. Will to power constitutes a plurality of forces and all the things in the world, trees, footballs, families and houses are constituted by such forces. But even though will to power constitutes our world; what does the “will to power” do? What does it will and what does it want? Deleuze explains:

Will to power does not mean that the will wants power […]. Power is the, genetic and differential element in the will. This is why the will is essentially creative […]. What the will to power wills is a particular relation of forces, a particular quality of forces. And also a particular quality of power: affirming or denying. […] In this way the will to power is essentially creative and giving: it does not aspire, it does not seek, it does not desire, above all it does not desire power.⁶⁸

What are we to make of this explanation? The question posed where “what does the will to power will?” and, in the end, Deleuze seems to reply that “the will to power […] does not want power.” That “the will to power does not want power” clearly sounds like a contradiction. However the supposed contradiction disappears when we keep in mind that Deleuze’s aim here is to describe structural patterns of Nietzsche’s ontology. We must therefore not see will to power as a subject searching power or as a psychological

⁶⁷ Jaspers, Karl, Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity, University Press of America, USA, 1985, pp. 287. Italics in original.
⁶⁸ Deleuze, 2005, pp. 85. Italics in original.
explanation of a desire for power. Rather will to power must be understood as the relation of forces that constitutes the world. At the ontological level then, there exists a plurality of forces and their particular relation is determined by the will to power. Therefore, because of its relating capacity, is it essentially creative and giving; it gives forces relation.

With an account of how Nietzsche wants to highlight becoming as the central theme to follow and a comprehension of how the will to power constitutes our world, we have grasped an understanding of Nietzsche’s ontological claims that will shed light on the problem of arbitrariness. The claim will be that a reference to his ontology will reject some versions of the problem of arbitrariness while not only allowing but more or less actively producing other versions. However, before we can deal with the problem of arbitrariness directly we must give an account of how interpretive (possible arbitrary) subjects enter the ontological picture.

**Becoming as dynamic selves**
The will to power is, as shown above, the differential element that creates constellations; it composes and constitutes the world. But even though we accept a conception of the world as will to power and arrive at the viewpoint that all things are composed by the differential element of forces; does this do away with the problem of arbitrariness?

Now, talk of arbitrariness in this context involves a shift: so far in this chapter when we have been occupied with Nietzsche’s ontology and the meta-level this involves, raising the question of arbitrariness demands a more concrete involvement of the particular entities in the world. In other words; an account of subjects must be given to see the concrete manifestations of the plurality of forces. The manifestations however, are conditioned by the ontology – what being consists of at its most fundamental level. Hence we can talk of a subject-level and a meta-level within Nietzsche’s thinking.

The problem of arbitrariness, understood as an external problem, points out that an interpreter – a subject – stands freely to adopt any perspective that she would like. This is seen as a consequence of the perspectivist's epistemological position. The problem arises from outside the perspectivist's position as a problem for the perspectivist.
in establishing knowledge as more than merely arbitrary. Thus it must be regarded as an external problem, arising with the use of perspectivism as epistemological method. And, the objectors hold, this shows us the disadvantages with Nietzsche’s philosophy. But, as already mentioned, we cannot presuppose a conventional interpretive subject if we sincerely take the doctrine of perspectivism into consideration. If we grasp the world and all things as composed out of a flux of forces, we must also perceive *ourselves* as such. Hence the identity and autonomy of subjects cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, subjects consist of the opposite of identity and autonomy, namely plurality and differentness, in the Nietzschean world-view. When the problem of arbitrariness is understood as an externally posed question it presupposes that there exists an *autonomous* subject that stands freely to make its own interpretations of the world, thus making knowledge a relativistic and arbitrary feature. The objection to this way of posing the question is therefore that it does not take the perspectivistic ontology into consideration. It simply stresses a few aspects or doctrines involved in the perspectivist’s thesis and criticises it for not fitting (or more precisely; turning out as an arbitrary feature) with another ontology; the ontology the objectors hold in advance. In other words; the perspectivistic subject is taken out of its context and put in another sphere, namely the realm of a conventionally thought ontology.

**Becoming as concrete experience**

Let us now turn to the interrelation between the two levels, that is, how the plurality and differences in the world manifests themselves as Nietzschean subjects. Nietzsche does not make use of static and essential selves in his thinking but with dynamic and becoming selves. A becoming self is achieved through experience, but we would be wrong in believing that a self is a becoming self *by* experiencing or through *having* experiences. The becoming-aspect does not mean that things change from being one thing to being another. Deleuze highlights this through an example of time:
How can the present pass? The passing moment could never pass if it were not already past and yet to come – at the same time as being present. If the present did not pass of its own accord, if it had to wait for a new present in order to become past, the past in general would never be constituted in time, and this particular present would not pass. We cannot wait, the moment must be simultaneously present and past, present and yet to come, in order for it to pass (and to pass for the sake of other moments). The present must coexist with itself as past and yet to come.\textsuperscript{69}

The dynamic of life is expressed through becoming. The becoming of the present is as essential as the becoming of the subject, so when the present is not constituted by a fixed constellation between all objects and forces in the world (as a determinist would be likely to hold), the subject is neither. Contrary to seeing the world as fixed and determined Nietzsche thinks that the present must be described as a becoming, as a movement, as a creative process. The present then is a transient quantity proposition. It might be objected that if we imagine ourselves “stopping” the “becoming process” and consider any moment in time, as if we pause a movie, we would – at least theoretically – be able to see the world as determined, measuring, for instance, the exact speed and direction of a smooth breeze. Hence for a determinist, each moment can only be substituted or exchanged by another moment. The perspectivist on the other hand would count this as a false conception of the world. For her, life and the world are not only in constant change but are also directed to what they are not yet: that is the essential feature of the present – being constitutive for what it is not yet. Hence past, present and future are “yet to come,” directed towards the future and hence \textit{becoming} in more than one way: first of all, the past is not something forever gone, as a set of events that once happened and as such has gone from being present to past. Rather, the past is constantly interpreted and thereby producing a never-enclosedness; being open for interpretation means being dynamic, changing and becoming: interpretations are never strict, so the same goes for the past. Secondly and more importantly, the past as well as the present is constitutive for the future. Now, this must not be taken as a strictly causal relation where the present functions as a cause producing the future as an effect. The past and the present’s constitutionalizing of the future describes an essentiality of the past and present itself: even if there was no future to come, the present and the past would still be directed to

\textsuperscript{69} Deleuze, 2005, pp. 48.
what it is not yet, it would still be instantly becoming as opposed to static being. Time (past, present, future) is therefore persistently dynamic, and putting the movie of all the events in the world on “pause” would not take away this ontological aspect. For Nietzsche the subject is thought of in the same way. Firstly, it does not consist of a specific set of physical characteristics and psychological properties. On the contrary, subjects are directed towards becoming and so are always interrelating and changing, being not anything stable and conform. Subjects undergo a constant transformation in that they engage in the world, affect their surroundings and become affected themselves. Secondly, always being causing and affecting expresses not only that the subject is dynamic and transitory itself, but that it is directed towards such change-making. Thus in Nietzsche’s ontology, being directed (towards what is not yet) plays a crucial role in what it is to be a subject; this directedness implies a break with a concern of being, of that which is; it involves a focus on becoming, the subject must see how everything is constantly becoming, including the subject itself. Jaspers expresses the thought of becoming as the basic ontological commitment in the following way:

The idea of becoming is identical with Nietzsche’s abstract, indemonstrable, and, to him, unquestionably self-evident and basic concept of being. A static being that merely exists is unthinkable for him. “We must never admit that anything just is.” To do so is an illusion which, by purporting to offer something permanent and superior, depreciates the incessant becoming that alone constitutes true being. Becoming has no goal to terminate in; it is not mere appearance; and, when taken in its entirety, it is beyond evaluation. It, and it alone, really is.70

Becoming is in other words not an achievement; becoming should not take place for the sake of something, but becoming itself “constitutes our being.” Now, how is it possible to become a becoming subject?71

Conform subjects experience the world as structured and stable. Valuations and ways of speaking are handed down from generation to generation, “good and evil” becomes dichotomies and “truth” is sought as the ultimate goal. The goal of interpretation in general is then to unveil the brute reality. However another form of experiencing is possible. Thinking “the will to power” all the way through means that we see the world

71 The term used by Nietzsche is how to become “ein Subjekt des Werdens.” I have translated it “a becoming subject” and will continue to use this term through the paper.
as composed of nothing more than a flux of forces. Being able to engage with the world, that is, interacting with the surroundings, affecting it by making new compositions arise and be affected oneself, that is, changed, one will also direct oneself towards that which becomes. Holding on to thoughts of identity of objects, autonomous and essential subjects and the like would not allow for being a becoming subject since it does not interrelate; simply it does not become.

Thinking of the becoming selves as becoming through experience has some interesting implications for how interpretation must be conceived. First of all, we cannot understand interpretation as an abstract, sense-seeking activity, as when philologists look for coherence in a text-material or art historians search for meanings in abstract paintings. Rather interpretation must be conceived of as a highly concrete activity; an activity of experiencing the differences that compose the world. In such a conception a plant stretching for the light would count as much as an interpretation than, say, me experiencing a nice cup of tea, or Jacques Derrida reading philosophy. Secondly, and in contrast to the former, common way of thinking of interpretation, we must not think of experiences as a confrontation with objects of homogeneous, stable and unifying character, rather experiences involve an engagement with the plural and heterogeneous flux of forces composing the world; since differences compose the world it is also that which must be experienced in a subject’s interpretation. Consequently, the activity of interpretation is somewhat “unsecured” since the objects or topics interpreted are never static, stable and homogenous. Rendering the insecurity of interpretation as a fault or lack is only possible presupposing former metaphysics where things are essentially self-identical, stable and conform. With Nietzsche, a reflection upon the particularity of the world and the divergences of interpretation this involves is called for, and we should adopt the insight, lead our life, make friends and have children in light of this realisation.  

To conclude then, the question of arbitrariness understood as an external problem is not sound since it cannot be posed from shared standards regarding the meta-level and the

---

72 For a more detailed treatment of the topic, see: Pippin, Robert, Modernism as a philosophical problem, Blackwell Publishers, Cornwall, 1999, chapter 4: “Nihilism stands at the door”: Nietzsche.” For an outline of the aspects involved with the “insecurity of interpretation,” see in particular pp. 91-99.
subject-level in Nietzsche’s philosophy. As already mentioned these objections to perspectivism (1) presuppose the existence of autonomous, essential subjects, while (2) tending to take homogeneity of the objects for granted: for an interpretation to be purely arbitrary it is also implied that there is a way of interpreting that is essentially non-arbitrary. A non-arbitrary interpretation of an object must then discover its true nature, which also presupposes a homogeneous substance. Precisely this is denied by a Nietzschean conception of interpretation. Finally (3) interpretations cannot be any exact description of the nature of things. Rather what interpretation involves is a concrete experience of differences which necessarily involves some sort of variety in the interpretation since neither the subject (the interpreter) nor the object (the interpreted) are stable constructs but rather plural and in constant change. How then, could a sound critique of Nietzsche be carried out?

**Criteria for critique**

On what grounds is the problem of arbitrariness refuted so far? As mentioned, it fails in taking the standards involved in perspectivism (both on meta-level and subject-level) into consideration: the problem of arbitrariness externally understood is posed from a standpoint that presupposes autonomous subjects, something the target for the critique (perspectivism) would deny. In the same critique objects are also implicitly taken as self-identical and conform, a view of objects perspectivism opposes. Overall there is a mismatch between ontological commitments between the critics of perspectivism and the perspectivist. Is Nietzsche immune from critique then? Does the postulation of his own alternative ontology function as protective barriers to external critique?

It should be appreciated that the problem of the critique outlined above emerges with its lack of a grasp of the intentions of Nietzsche’s claims. The introduction of his alternative ontology at the cost of the former, hegemonic world-view certainly serves a purpose; a redirection of life. In making this redirection surface, Nietzsche launches his alternative approach, regarding the world as a multiplicity of forces, subjects as dynamic, transitory and unstable. Now, if a critique neither acknowledges nor recognises the intentions of the criticised position, it is likely to lose its strength: for a critique to be coherently carried out, a primary condition must be to offer an intelligible understanding
of the position criticised. This is not the equivalent of rendering a critique external as distinct from immanent. External critiques are perfectly capable of picking fault with former beliefs or theories. For instance Willard Quine has made a crucial critique of logical empiricism by explaining the incredibility of a strict distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, without being committed to logical empiricism in advance or pointing out any immanent incoherence with its theorems. The critique was posed from an external point of view, claiming that logical empiricism must be rendered incoherent due to other, external facts showing that analytic and empirical statements did not diverge in any principal or analytical account. Now, the incredibility of the problem of arbitrariness outlined above is not that it is external, but that it is founded on principles opposite to those of Nietzsche’s, and, as such, do not become crucial for the overall project; it does not hit the core of his philosophical thoughts; simply it does not affect Nietzsche’s concern. What is justifying Nietzsche’s ontology then? Which reasons lead us to reject former metaphysics, rendering Nietzsche’s alternative approach as the rightful one?

One of the peculiarities of Nietzsche’s position stems from his contempt of former philosophy, former world-views, former value judgments and so on. An ongoing quest for foundation would be rendered as belonging to this degenerative form of reasoning; believing that things can be justified by a search for foundations is one of the attitudes Nietzsche opposes. After all, Nietzsche renders a search for truth itself as a fault; “what questions this will to truth has already set before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions!” This means that a demand for foundation for Nietzsche’s ontology is itself a fault, a degenerating way of reasoning, an obstacle of letting life itself guide our actions: the action of asking for foundations for Nietzsche’s ontology does in itself pay no attention to the implications his position proclaims. Thus demanding reasons for adopting Nietzsche’s alternative ontology does not acknowledge the intentions of his project, hence cannot be rendered a sound critique. What then characterises sound critiques of Nietzsche?

---

73 For an substantial account of how Quine carry out his critique of distinguishing analytic and synthetic truths the reader are referred to consulting the original work: See Quine, Willard V. O., “Two dogmas of empiricism” in From a Logical Point of View, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2001.

74 Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 33.
As already stated, for a critique to be successful it must not be founded on conditions that the criticised position renders false. In the example with the logical positivists, Quine did not build his arguments on premises that the logical positivists could not accept. In the case of Nietzsche this means that the ontology places constraints on the methodology. In other words, if one does not accept the becoming aspect of being-in-the-world, a critique is not likely to maintain any strength of its punchline. On the other hand, an acceptance of becoming as a feature of life, rendering self-identity of objects false and opposing a view of subjects being static and conform lays the path open for striking critiques. As such, critiques can be loyal to Nietzsche’s ontological commitments even though they render the position false.

Now, after Nietzsche’s redemption of truths, identities, foundations and the like, does anything remain valuable? If subjects should direct themselves towards life, what are the criteria for doing so? How would one be justified in such a direction? After radically transforming the ontological picture, it should be of no surprise that Nietzsche also renders conditions for validity as fundamentally different from former valuations. Validity for Nietzsche takes the form of something redeeming, magnificent, positive and affirmative directed towards the future, to which we now proceed.

**Aesthetics as epistemological validity**

An understanding of Nietzsche’s concept of validity cannot be achieved without discerning the fundamental thoughts of life and subjects as **becoming** as described above. In the first essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes:

Common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a doing, as an effect of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express strength or not to. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind the doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is simply fabricated into the doing – the doing is everything. Common people basically double the doing when they have the lightning flash; this is a doing-doing: the same happening is posited first as cause and then once again as its effect.\(^75\)

Here Nietzsche challenges our distinction of an acting subject and the actions it produces. In Nietzsche’s opinion we cannot separate the two. That is because one is nothing but

one’s actions. How can that be? It is so because we are not something autonomous, independent and constant, but rather transient and fluctuating. It is therefore not me as an autonomous being expressing myself that comes to surface while acting. I am not showing some distinct side of myself or making use of some of my capacities while acting. I simply am. I am nothing else than what I do. Thus I am nothing else than my effects, and I am nothing else than the experiences I produce upon the world.76

Likewise it would be a mistake to separate strength or power from how it is vented. Strength is not a potentiality that exists with the possibility of being used. Strength is itself an expression, it is an expression of producing effects upon the world and to create, that is, causing differences:

To demand of strength that it not express itself as strength, that it not be a desire to overwhelm, a desire to cast down, a desire to become lord, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as nonsensical as to demand of weakness that it express itself as strength. A quantum of power is just such a quantum of drive, will, effect – more precisely, it is nothing other than this very driving, willing, effecting, and only through the seduction of language (and the basic errors of reason petrified therein), which understands and misunderstands all effecting as conditioned by an effecting something, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise.77

It would of course be a failure to think of strength as a type of superiority as having powerful brawn or being heavily armed. It would be similarly misleading seeing strength or power as being an authority i.e. holding important positions in a society. Nietzsche describes something completely different: Power is the ability to produce changes in the world. Brawn for instance, could not help us in this topic since real changes in the world not consist of changing the location of things, as in moving one object from one place to another. It is only when the changes create something new that power is involved. For instance, moving the chessmen randomly around on a chess-board would not be an expression of strength or power, even though it requires some sort of brawn. It is only when the movement of a chessman creates a new constellation of the game that something creative has been done. Now, Nietzsche clearly has other, more fundamental aims than a creative way of playing chess. Nietzsche is talking of nothing less than a

76 In analogy: the world is nothing else than experiences. The world cannot be conceived of something more real than the experience of it; likewise we cannot be conceived of as being something other than our actions.
creation of new values, beyond any comparison or measurement: “Measure is alien to us [philosophers of the future], let us admit it to ourselves; what we itch for is the infinite, the unmeasured.”\textsuperscript{78} What is needed then is to give content to other ways of valuing life, thus forming other concepts, producing other entities, avoiding conformity and stability. How is this done?

In Nietzsche’s opinion, our conceptions and value-judgments up to this day are nothing but amputations and diminishments. As Habermas points out, Nietzsche’s chief claim against the modern society is that it is not occupied with life anymore. With modernity the society has been transformed into something merely technical. The technicality can explain “the course of nature, but […] never give man commands.”\textsuperscript{79} Thus the naïve, optimistic rationalism cannot cope with problems related to life and existence. This produces a sort of crisis, arising from a lack of values in life.

When Nietzsche introduces the “death of God” it does not merely mean that the Christian God is dead. It is also an expression of the fall of all higher values.\textsuperscript{80} Thus the apostasy of all higher ideas and ideals leads to a lack of values. It does not help that the secularisation in society, with its focus on materialisation, entertainment and technical inventions takes the place of the former higher values, since the new, modern values entail a denial of life itself. The modern values – i.e. the trust of science as a provider of truth – have no attachment to life itself. Hence modern life stands out as perfectly meaningless. Consequently then, the fundament for our values finds itself in crisis. An undermining of the legitimacy of our values has taken place through the secularisation.\textsuperscript{81}

As for modernity, Christianity also represents a denial of life. With its diminishment of the importance of the senses and of the earthly life as anything valuable, it not only denies life but expresses ressentiment par excellence: It produces a hate directed at life:

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Nietzsche2003} Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 154.
\bibitem{Nietzsche2004} Nietzsche, quoted in Habermas, 2004, pp. 292.
\bibitem{Hammer2006} These thoughts were developed during a seminar with Espen Hammer at the University of Oslo, 28\textsuperscript{th} - 30\textsuperscript{th} August 2006. I am in debt to him for many of the thoughts outlined here.
\end{thebibliography}
The idea we are fighting about here is the valuation of our life on the part of the ascetic priest [advocating Christian morality]: he relates our life […] to an entirely different kind of existence, which it opposes and excludes […]. The ascetic treats life as a wrong path that one must finally retrace back to the point where it begins; or as an error that one refutes through the deeds – should refute: for he demands that one go along with him; where he can, he forces his valuation of existence […] [which is being] hostile to life […].

The hate is even directed towards oneself; as a sensible and earthly being one is incorporated with the object of the hate. In opposition to Nietzsche’s predicaments “amor fati” – “love your destiny” or “love life” (– and we could also say; “love yourself”), Christianity orders a hate towards life and a hate towards yourself.

What Nietzsche predicates then is a radical revaluing where life itself is directing our values. Modernity and Christianity must be located on a lower ontological level since they do not let life itself be the guiding principle for our valuations. The correction of this – the actual “reawakening of life” – has the form of something magnificent, sublime, something oriented towards the future, optimistic, affirmative and creative; an aesthetic ideal. Nietzsche describes this ideal in his mention of the free spirits:

After all this do I still need to say that they too will be free, very free spirits, these philosophers of the future – just as surely as they will not be merely free spirits, but something more, higher, greater and thoroughly different that does not want to be misunderstood or taken for what it is not.

But what does this ideal consist of other than being “something more, higher, greater and different”? Or, if there are no other ideals than those, what does it mean to be something more, higher, greater and different? A possible reply is found in the following:

In all the countries of Europe and likewise in America there exists at present something that misuses this name [of the free spirits], a very narrow, enclosed, chained up species of spirits who desire practically the opposite of that which informs our aims and instincts. […] What with all their might they would like to strive after is the universal green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, comfort and an easier life for all; their two most oft-recited doctrines and ditties are ‘equality of rights’ and ‘sympathy for all that suffers’ – and suffering itself they take for something that has to be abolished.

The passage is an example of the impossibility of explicitly expressing what the new valuing, the valuing of the true free spirits, consists of. But it is only described through negativity, thus what it is not. A positive account of the content of the values that the free

---

spirits prescribe is lacking. On the other hand, it is clear that the free spirits stand for the exact opposite of the herd-morality. A description of the values through its opposite is hence useful after all. So what is described? What is it that the free spirits are not?

The free spirits do not simply substitute “equality of rights” and “sympathy for all that suffers” with statements as “differentiated rights” and “antipathy for all that suffers.” It is the universality of these statements that must be addressed. The claim of universal approval expressed by these claims is a clear example of *ressentiment*, a degenerating way of thinking, according to Nietzsche. It expresses conformism, stability and rigidity that influences far more than the sphere of where it occurs (as moral statements). In the end such statements contribute to the conception of universality as a condition for validity, it imposes a view upon entities as something stable and in no way encourages a *creative* attitude of forming value-judgements. Rather, authority, universality, conformity and stability are their main ingredients. Differentiation, creation of own values, particularisation in the conception of entities – all this, which is opposite of degenerated ways of thinking, must therefore be essential in a spirit that longs to be “more, higher, greater and different.”\(^{85}\) This is a mainly aesthetic ideal: it is the magnificent in *creation* that is embraced. The activity of coining own concepts, new entities, other structures and different judgements, is a matter of *aesthetics*. Being able to engage oneself in the differential structure of power, and thereby forming new creations is an aesthetic ideal. Moreover, since the adoption of such values includes particularity, the inexpressiveness of a positive expression of the meaning of values as being something “more, higher, greater and different,” is a necessity. Being *different* for instance cannot of course be described exactly, since adoption of a specific behavior would lead to conformity rather than differentiation. Furthermore, Nietzsche does not have in mind any strict or specific idea of valuing, except being capable of coining one’s own concepts and individual value-judgments. It is the fight against concepts *as they have been taught us*, or the look upon entities *to which we are used*, that is launched by his attack on “the herd morality.”

As mentioned above, Nietzsche is using concepts of aesthetics to describe his new ideal and the way truly becoming subjects will lead their lives. The core structure of

---

\(^{85}\) Nietzsche, Friedrich, BGE, 2003, pp. 71.
establishing validity so far then, is this (extremely compromised): *Becoming is the central concept from which life should be grasped. The world is will to power; a flux of forces where differences rather than identities compose entities. Subjects become a becoming subject by realizing the ontological structure of the world and opposing a conforming, ready-made form of life handed over from former generations. Being a becoming subject involves an essential activity of creation of everything accepted; the subject is itself creating its world (valuations, judgments, interpretations, concepts, etc.).* This is in no way unproblematic: firstly, what grounds does Nietzsche give for us to adopt his ontological claims? And exactly how are essentially creative interpretations (or creations) carried out? Secondly, is not such a creative, self-legislative subject ultimately arbitrary, regarding every interpretation as founded on its own creations? The latter question is the topic for the last chapter. The two former questions will be dealt with in the following section.

**A position which cannot be adopted: aesthetics and self-reference**
The second essay in *On the Genealogy of Morality* is also an example of a radical revaluation of former values. Nietzsche explores here the origin of the concept of “guilt” and “bad conscience.” The claim is that these can be traced back to the action of trading, where the buyer first fell into debt to the seller in case he could not fulfil the agreement made between them. Nietzsche then argues that Christianity and Christian morality have taken over the concept of guilt and bad conscience, but given it another context and reason: from the introduction of Christianity we have been sinners in front of God. God stepped up as the new creditor and the human species took the role of the debtors; hence in the Christian picture, every man is conceived as a sinner in debt to God. To be fair to Nietzsche’s exploration of this process, a lot of aspects must be highlighted and explained. Although interesting, the purpose of this paper is not to investigate Nietzsche’s genealogical skills, that is, how right he is in claiming that the origin of guilt and bad conscience can be traced back to the structure of trading. Focus is rather centered on the possibility of giving new values that the refutation of the “validity” of former concepts implies. When we free ourselves from the thoughts that we are sinners (with the help of genealogical work that sees guilt and bad conscience as established by a pragmatic
method of collecting debt) we stand free to adopt another picture of ourselves. But if we are not first and foremost sinners, what, then, are we?

We must avoid a rigid answer to that question if we aim to take the aspect of becoming seriously. A possible reply could therefore be that first and foremost we are not anything stable, structured or rigid. We are by no means conform and autonomous beings but open and transient, plural and fleeting. And importantly; we are nothing as something first and foremost. Receptivity to the environment, transitoriness and changeability are our true nature. But if we are loyal to the statement “receptivity to the environment, transitoriness and changeability is our true nature,” we should also be claiming that in the end there is something that we are first and foremost, namely transitory and changeable. The paradox must be highlighted in some more detail: The claim is that we are not something “first and foremost.” Rather our essential property (true nature) is being transitory and changeable. But if being “transitory and changeable” is an essential property of the subject it seems like being “transitory and changeable” also has to be our first and foremost property since the expression “first and foremost” expresses essentiality. In other words, it seems like a logical impossibility to ascribe essential properties to a subject that “has no essence.” The structure of this paradox is equal to the problem of self-reference. The form is seemingly self-refuting and appears frequently in Nietzsche’s texts, for instance in Beyond Good and Evil: “The falseness of a judgement is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgement.”86 The contradiction becomes clear when we ask for the truth-content of this claim. Is it true that the “falseness of a judgement is […] not necessarily an objection”? If it is true, it does not matter whether the quotation is right or wrong. What is striking is the undermining of the speaker’s position that is caused by the content of that which is uttered. As the sentence “all sentences are lies” can never be successful (since if it is true it is self-refuting) Nietzsche seems to place himself in the same position.

For Nietzsche however this type of arguing has clear ties to an ordinary, degenerating way of valuing. And he not only dislikes but despises the valuations and conceptions of the world that has prevailed to this day. He labels this type of valuing “psychology”:

86 Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 35.
All psychology has hitherto remained anchored to moral prejudices and timides: it has not ventured into the depths. To conceive it as morphology and the *development-theory of the will to power*, as I conceive it – has never yet so much as entered the mind of anyone else: in so far as it is permissible to see in what has hitherto been written a symptom of what has hitherto been kept silent. The power of the moral prejudices has penetrated deep into the most spiritual world, which is apparently the coldest and most free of presuppositions – and, as goes without saying, has there acted in a harmful, inhibiting, blinding, distorting fashion.\(^{87}\)

The proposed revaluing of former values will, according to Nietzsche, not only serve as an alternative to present psychology – anchored as it is in morality – but exceed such morality, offering a *new realm* of valuing.

\[T\]here are in fact a hundred good reasons why everyone should keep away from it [present psychology] who – can! On the other hand: if your ship has been driven into these seas, very well! Now clench your teeth! Keep your eyes open! Keep a firm hand on the helm! – We sail straight over morality and past it, we flatten, we crush perhaps what is left of our own morality by venturing to voyage thither – but what do we matter! Never yet has a *deeper* world of insight revealed itself to daring travellers and adventurers.\(^{88}\)

Nietzsche seems to suggest that we should exceed these prevailing valuations. We need to keep in mind that Nietzsche wants to open up new ways of thinking, conceiving transitoriness and changeability as new possibilities of being. Using conceptions of prevailing (rigid) logic to understand what is expressed by transitoriness and changeability would therefore be of no help. A perspectivist would deny that an essential property of a subject has to be “first and foremost,” since the transitoriness and changeability expresses a constant variation of the composing parts or forces of the subject. A more fundamental rejection would be to say that these ways of thinking do not take Nietzsche’s stress upon *creation* into consideration. To offer a new way of thinking it is demanded that we break with the traditional pattern of thinking. As has been shown, conformity and stability must be abandoned. Using the concepts and the logic involved in stating the problem of self-reference and of “our essential selves” could therefore be seen as essentially degenerating, an example of *ressentiment*.

How plausible is this line of argument? Paradoxically, the insistence on the exceedance of former psychology could also function as an objection to Nietzsche’s own position: for this much is clear, that the criteria for valuing, what has been called his

\(^ {87}\) Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 53. Italics in original.
\(^ {88}\) Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 53-54.
aesthetic ideal, seem to demand a totally new vocabulary due to its fundamental break with all former concepts and valuations. Thus this “deeper world of insight” cannot share any standards with the former. Consequently Nietzsche’s way of valuing must be incomparable with former attempts. Now, this certainly puts Nietzsche’s critique of former “psychology” in a strange light, since the argument of modern concepts’ lack of value takes place within Nietzsche’s own vocabulary. Nietzsche’s insistence on former psychology’s ressentiment is flawed since no place is left from where the critique could have been presented. It is only of small comfort that the same holds for critics of Nietzsche, since the foundations of why we must search for a higher valuation are discarded. For want of comparability, Nietzsche’s objections cannot be settled: we simply lack the criteria needed to asses their specific validity. The aesthetic ideal and the worldview that goes with it concomitantly maintain a possible alternative to adopt, but so do modernity and present psychology. Nietzsche does not provide any arguments persuading the rational reader to attempt an exceeding of former values.

What this critique overlooks however, is that Nietzsche is not interested in establishing traditional, sound philosophical arguments. His whole style and especially the franticness in his critique of modernity and former psychology, indicates that this is not “normal” philosophy, making use of purely “rational” arguments. As has been repeatedly claimed, Nietzsche aims for a radical revaluation of all values, and this calls for a philosophy that is not affected by westernised metaphysics. Nietzsche creates therefore a vocabulary unaffected by the conformity and technicality of former metaphysical thinking. That the new vocabulary is incomparable with the former is a necessity to overcome valuations, dichotomies and judgements that the use of concepts of westernised metaphysics involves. Again, taking Nietzsche’s ontology into consideration we come to see that the incomparability of vocabulary is not a lack or fault of reasoning, but a necessity to be free of truly creating our own concepts, our own judgements and our own valuations.

As repeatedly claimed, Nietzsche wants to replace former values with a creative and affirmative way of thinking. Now, where does such an attempt leave us? Is Nietzsche offering an epistemological or philosophical position which can be readily adopted; thus
leaving us an epistemological position, metaphorically speaking, with the doors open and
the engine running? It is clear that perspectivism is not a position with any theorems or
doctrines (holding such would be truly self-refuting for a perspectivist). Zarathustra
shows this by refusing to show how a “rightful” or “truly creative” way of living could be
attained: “This – is just my way: - where is yours?” Thus I answered those who asked of
me ‘the way.’ For the way – does not exist!” Nietzsche offers a position where the
subjects themselves must create the content of it. It is a position where nothing is given
but the insistence of creation. Zarathustra, the master of creation, uses his authority to tell
his disciples not to obey him or worship him in any way:

Verily, I counsel you: go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be
ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you. […] One repays a teacher poorly if one always remains only
a student. […] You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what does Zarathustra matter? You are my
believers: but what do any believers matter? You had not yet sought yourselves: then you found me. Thus
do all believers: that is why all belief is worth so little. The insistence on creation thus means that doctrines cannot be adopted. One needs to
remain critical towards everything existing, everything found – including Zarathustra.
Only then can truly creative steps be taken. This becomes even clearer in the passage of
Zarathustra’s meeting with “Zarathustra’s ape.” Zarathustra’s ape is the local fool of a
great city and has attained his name because he had “gathered something of the phrasing
and cadences of Zarathustra’s speech and also liked to borrow from the treasure of his
wisdom.” Parts of this “borrowed wisdom” come to light when Zarathustra’s ape warns
Zarathustra not to enter the city since it is filled with “the fumes of slaughtered spirit” –
“Here is Hell for solitaries’ thoughts: here great thoughts are boiled alive and then cooked
down small.” What Zarathustra’s ape has learned to despise is obedience: “I serve, you
serve, we serve’ – thus all skilful virtue prays to the prince on high” – but there is no
prince on high in this city, everyone is a servant. However, Zarathustra is not impressed
by the speech of Zarathustra’s ape. Zarathustra’s ape has not done anything except adopt
Zarathustra’s valuations: “They call you my ape, you frothing fool: but I call you my

90 Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 68.
grunting swine – with your grunting you spoil for me my praise of folly. [...] [Y]our fool’s words harm me, even when you are right! And if Zarathustra’s words were even a hundred times right, by my words you would always – do wrong!”93 An adaptation and mere repetition is always wrong, even of Zarathustra’s teaching. Or more precisely; an adaptation of Zarathustra’s teaching as a dogma or script of how to act, what to value, what to despise and the like, must be avoided. Thus taking Zarathustra as an authority is not a promising way of understanding his teaching: “Dead are all Gods: now we want the Overhuman to live.”94 As stated earlier, that the gods are dead means that there is no longer any outer authority. All the higher values have fallen. This certainly includes both Zarathustra and Nietzsche. They have no aim of standing up as the salvation of the human race, giving meaning and content to the world by flashing doctrines and making people obey them, thus making them slaves. Rather we are invited to guard ourselves against their position to get ready to create our own meaning and form our own valuation. In Zarathustra’s words: “I am fond of the sea and all that is of the sea’s kind, and even fondest when it angrily contradicts me.”95

To make a brief summary then, we have seen how Nietzsche’s ontology is constituted by the will to power as a flux of forces constituting entities. By highlighting the concept of becoming we can see how things are constantly moving, changing and being dynamic. Subjects are constituted in this picture, not by being founded as self-identical and static, but by being transitory and changeable. Now, to object the notion that subjects are arbitrary in their interpretation seems to presume another ontology in which subjects are autonomous and self-identical, capable of making both arbitrary and non-arbitrary interpretations of other, stable entities in the world: nonetheless, Nietzsche does not rule out valuation per se. The aesthetic ideal prescribes an activity of sublime creations, a redemption of everything conform, a responsibility of coining individual concepts, individual valuations and individual judgments. The quest is, therefore, if this stress of self-legislative creation lets the problem of arbitrariness in the back door: does not a highlighting of original creation imply that the subject, and the subject only, gives

94 Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 68.
content to that which is interpreted or created? These problems are taken up in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: Arbitrariness as immanent problem

The problem of arbitrariness remains an immanent problem. Even though we accept Nietzsche’s ontology, adopt the required vocabulary and, through this, overcome westernised metaphysical thinking, Nietzsche’s insistence on creation of values seems to lead to arbitrariness. In this chapter I will look into how the Zarathustra-character represents a manifestation of the aesthetic ideal, thus a subject capable of overcoming degenerating forces, making creation and affirmation of life come through. The aesthetic ideal may be successful in bringing focus back to life, avoiding a concern with truth and identities. Nevertheless, it does not provide a satisfying answer to the problem of arbitrariness. As will be shown, the affirmative attitude of Zarathustra – the very redemption of degenerating forces – only intensify arbitrariness as a serious problem for Nietzsche’s philosophical position. The problem is immanent then since all the claims of perspectivism are embraced, as is Nietzsche’s ontology, but still interpretive subjects can be rendered arbitrary.

In the very beginning of Thus Spoke Zarathustra we find a description of three levels of living, symbolised with a camel, a lion and a child.\textsuperscript{96} In the following section I will consider that which constitutes the camel’s world (the first level of living), inhabited by the Spirit of Heaviness, which weighs it down, and show how Zarathustra, as a manifestation of the aesthetic ideal, overcomes these burdens by exceeding them. Possessing the capacity to overcome, however, seems to lead to unbearable arbitrariness, for is not being radically redemptive and creative the same as abandoning all relation to

\textsuperscript{96} Nietzsche actually talks of “three transformations” from were it is logical to draw the implication that there actually are four levels of living, since the first transformation have to be a transformation from something (one level) to something else (another level). Although it would be interesting to examine what the basic level consists of, especially since Nietzsche prevents himself from giving any description of this level, this is not of importance for my purpose here. The aim is rather to see how the different levels of living necessitate certain ways of approaching life. The passage referred to is found in Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 23-24.
others, making oneself the only reference for any interpretation? This question will recur throughout the chapter. After seeing how Zarathustra opposes the Spirit of Heaviness, I will in the next section consider how the actions of the child (the third level of living) signify a radical and total creation. As already mentioned, we will then be in a position to see how such a state of total creativity seems to lead to arbitrariness. In the following discussion it will also be considered how the lion (the second level of living) takes a middle position, fighting conforming, degenerating ideals without itself being truly affirmative and creative. Finally I will propose a hermeneutical reading, rendering the redemptive, creative actions of Zarathustra free from an accusation of total arbitrariness.

**Zarathustra vs. the Spirit of Heaviness**

At the first level the spirit takes the shape of a camel: it carries a heavy load on its back. The load is characterised through the “Spirit of Heaviness” and the Spirit’s attitude towards life is dismal: “All that is straight lies […]. All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle.” After the death of God and the lack of any outer authority the Spirit of Heaviness finds neither meaning nor pleasure in life and thus he wills it.\(^{97}\) The aim for the Spirit of Heaviness is therefore not a search for a meaningful, creative, loving and Yes-saying life. The Spirit of Heaviness is rather a character of melancholy as far as he sees the lost (the lack of authority and thus of meaning) as lost and by such accents this lost-ness. The focus is centred on the past, on that which was – that which existed – but which no longer is. Further on, the existing continuously perishes since no moments remain in the present – every existing moment will soon be rendered past - and the continuous loss of the existing produces thereby a fundamental lack of consistency and stability in life. Thus a hate is produced; it directs itself towards the lack of the preservation of the existing. The hate is directed to the transitoriness of the existing and thereby towards the lack of stability. Every moment is thus seen as transitory; the problem is that the existing does not last and hence the moment does not possess any substance; that everything perishes and is bound to do so is seen as an ongoing, indeed endless process. Hence the Spirit of Heaviness directs his hate towards the moment, or at least the transitoriness of the

---

\(^{97}\) Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 167.
moment.\textsuperscript{98} In short then, the burden of the camel consists of a way of thinking (the Spirit of Heaviness’) that prevents an achievement of the aesthetic ideal; in a world dominated by a continual loss, a focus of creative becoming looks impossible.

In opposition, the Zarathustra-character represents lightness, love of life and affirmation of the moment. He does not see the past as lost or the transitoriness of the moment as a source for lost-ness. Zarathustra rather works as a redeemer for all that was: “I taught them to work creatively on the future, and creatively to redeem – all that \textit{was}.”\textsuperscript{99} Focus is not centred on the past as something that once existed but no longer exists. In so far as the past occupies Zarathustra it works as a platform for the future, as a background of possibilities for new creations and new constellations.

Such creation is simultaneously an affirmation of the moment: ”’To redeem what is past in human beings, and to re-create all ’It was’ until the will speaks: ’But thus I willed it! Thus shall I will it’”\textsuperscript{100} The re-creation of the past must slip into an affirmation of the type \textit{thus shall I will it} in order to be an affirmation of the moment. In other words, all past happenings are seen as wanted because of the possibilities they open up for the future. Hence the three tenses (past, present, future) are united, taught in once and functions as “a redeemer of all that was” in order to “create that which will become.” Zarathustra’s eye is therefore directed towards the future. The concept of the past holds possibilities for the future rather than loss of the existing. This opposition of conceiving time unfolds in a scene where the Spirit of Heaviness and Zarathustra come to fight a battle: the scene opens with Zarathustra climbing a mountain carrying the Spirit of Heaviness in the shape of a dwarf on his back:

\begin{quote}
Upward: – although he sat on me half dwarf, half mole; lame; lamming; dripping lead into my ear, lead-drop thoughts in to my brain. ‘O Zarathustra,’ he whispered mockingly, syllable by syllable, ‘you philosophers’ stone! You threw yourself up, but every upthrown stone must – fall[‘] ‘O Zarathustra, you philosophers’ stone, you slingshot-stone, you star-pulverizer! You threw yourself so high – but every upthrown stone – must fall[‘] ‘Sentence to yourself and to your own stoning: O Zarathustra, far indeed you threw the stone – but onto \textit{you} will it come falling back!’\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{98} Hammer, 28.-30. August, 2006.
\textsuperscript{100} Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 172.
\textsuperscript{101} Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 134-135.
The metaphoric in the passage is weight: while Zarathustra is striving upwards, searching for the peaks and overcoming the mountain in terms of mastering it, the dwarf is pushing everything down and downwards, back to conformity and non-creativity. Even Zarathustra’s faculty of being redeeming and exceeding is countered by the dwarf claiming that “every upthrown stone must fall.” In other words, being essentially creative, making stones fly and the like will also come to an end; every creation will perish, every upthrown stone must fall. Typically then, the dwarfs choice of metaphor is a stone; a heavy, hard substance, a cold and lifeless object that is difficult to shape and even harder to re-shape or transform. Zarathustra on the other hand is talking of the affirmative as an eagle, a living and light creature, flying, directed towards the sky and light, building nests on the peaks and in the treetops, bringing associations to ascent (while the stone represents decent). The dwarf represents sickness; being lame and with laming thoughts, thus making his listeners passive, not-moving, not-reacting, not responding, unconcerned and thoughtless. In this manner the dwarf represents an obstacle and a hatred of the creative, exceeding actions of Zarathustra.

The situation then escalates into a confrontation were Zarathustra seeks to discard the dwarf, thus offering a thought that the dwarf – the Spirit of Heaviness – cannot bear (not because of its weight but because of the affirmation that it implies). The passage is worth citing at length:

“Stop dwarf”! I said. “I, or you! But I am the stronger of us two – for you do not know my abyss-deep thought! That – you would not be able to bear!” Then something happened that made me lighter: for the dwarf jumped down from my shoulder, out of curiosity! And he squatted down on a rock in front of me. But there was a gateway right where we had stopped. “Behold this gateway, dwarf!” I continued. “It has two faces. Two ways come together here: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane out there – that is another eternity. They contradict themselves, these ways; they confront one another head on, and here, at this gateway, is where they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above it: ‘Moment.’ But whoever should walk farther on one of them – on and on, farther and farther: do you believe, dwarf, that these ways contradict themselves eternally?” – “All that is straight lies,” murmured the dwarf contemptuously. “All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle.” “You Spirit of Heaviness!” I said angrily. “Do not make it too light and easy for yourself! Or I shall leave you squatting where you squat, Lamefoot – and I carried you up! Behold,” I said, “this moment! From this gateway Moment a long eternal lane runs backward: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever among all things can walk have walked this lane already? Must not whatever among all things can happen have happened, and been done, and passed by already? And if everything has already been, what do you think dwarf, of this moment? Must this gateway too not already – have been? And are not all things knotted together so tightly that this moment draws after it all things that are to come? Thus – – itself as well? For whatever among all things can walk: in this long lane out, too – it must walk once more! – And this slow-moving spider, crawling in the moonlight, and this

---

moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must we not all have been here before? – and must come again and walk in that other lane, out there, before us, in this long and dreadful lane – must we not eternally come back again? – “103

The core of the philosophical argument in the passage concerns the eternity of time: if time stretches eternally back, we must also conclude that every possible combination of the arrangement of the world has taken place. Similarly; if time stretches eternally forth, every possible combination of the arrangement of the world will take place: it will repeat itself, eternally. If we think of a pair of dice for instance, each showing six numbers, there exists a fixed number of possible combinations: we can have the combination 1-1, 1-2, … 2-2, 2-3 … and so on, 36 possible combinations in total.104 Now, every possible combination of all the objects in the world certainly adds up to an incomprehensible high number. But through the concept of eternity it is implied that all these possible combinations has occurred in the past and will occur again in the future. Furthermore, in the light of eternity, each of these combinations will not only happen, but also be repeated, repeated in eternity. In this account, moments must be regarded as the opposite of lost – they are doomed to an eternal repetition.

It might be argued that there is something inappropriate with the account of eternity in this argument: it is claimed that eternal time implies that every combination of things has taken and will take place in eternity. But this thought seems to presuppose that there is something limited that we are referring to; “every combination of things” refers to a specific set of possible combinations (of things, objects, forces or whatever) that is not eternal. Thus the concept of “eternity” is not thought all the way through; it applies merely to the concept of time, leaving “the combination of things” a limited set, as in a closed box.105 It may also be hard to see why the thought of the eternity of time overcome what the dwarf represents: admittedly, conceiving time as eternal renders it impossible that moments are forever gone, lost and unattainable, but such insights seem to lead to nothing but what the dwarf proclaims; an indifference as to what will happen (everything will take place anyway) and an apathy to life.

104 That is if we don’t pay tension to which of the dices that contains the numbers. For instance the combination “dice A show the number 1 and dice B the number 2” would count as the same combination as “dice A show the number 2 and dice B the number 1.”
105 The argument was presented by Hammer 28.-30. August, 2006.
However a more plausible approach can be maintained: if we take Zarathustra’s claims of eternity not as a factual happening but as an experiment of thought we can conclude that a happening (say the dwarf and Zarathustra talking about eternity) could repeat itself in eternity. Whether it does or not is of no importance. What is gained in this interpretation is that the willing or wanting of the possibility of an eternal return remains open. And this is itself an affirmation of the moment: the moment is no longer seen as continuously lost, but as a source of “the coming moment.” The direction of the thought is towards the future, towards “what is not yet” but which is “yet to come.” The present moment then functions as the source of a possibility of creating a future. For the affirmative individual this means that longings for satisfaction, sorrows and loss are redeemed and turned into something positive. By constantly being directed towards the future the individual opens up new possibilities: joy of creating her own surroundings, a love of life reflected through the thrill of letting things have importance for her. The affirmative individual makes the society a playground for her own potentiality, creativity, wants and desires.

Through the thought of eternity, that the moment will eternally repeat itself, it becomes possible to affirm the moment as something wanted. In affirming the moment the individual accepts this structure; the past is a source of creation for the future, the rigidity in thinking that “what is done is done and can never be changed” – thus seeing the past moment as something forever gone – is redeemed, turned into a positive possibility of creating the future. This type of affirmation of the moment is expressed by Zarathustra, claiming: “I taught them to work creatively on the future, and creatively to redeem – all that was. To redeem what is past in human beings, and to re-create all ‘It was’ until the will speaks: ‘But thus I willed it! Thus shall I will it – ‘ – This I called redemption, and this alone I taught them to call redemption.” Zarathustra insists on an affirmative attitude towards life in holding “thus shall I will it” for any moment in time. Every moment shall be wanted with the possibility of eternally returning, and the subject itself shall will that every moment shall be wanted to be repeated in eternity. This necessitates an affirmative attitude. To will that the eternal return shall take place entails

---

106 Hammer presented this argument (28.-30. August, 2006) but gave it rather different implications than I intend to do.
moments being thought of in such positive, possibility-opening way. The interpretation of
the eternal return not as a factual returning of moments, but with a hypothetical or
possible returning is compatible with this attitude; *thus shall I will it*. It is the structure of
affirmation that will return, the positive redeeming of the past to a source of creation in
the future will return in eternity. And this attitude is unbearable for the Spirit of
Heaviness. The dwarf uses the concept of time to advocate that the transitoriness and
perishableness of the existing must lead to thoughtlessness, unconcernedness and apathy.
Zarathustra highlights creation as the fundamental aspect regarding time (past, present
and future), implying an affirmation of the moment, creativity towards the future and a
Yes-saying towards life. The “eternal return” is hence not an alternative scientific or
epistemological approach. It is a suggested attitude towards life and a manifestation of
the aesthetic ideal; an engagement with life, thus an affirmation of life – *amor fati*. Now,
what problems does such an affirming attitude produce?

**Affirmative creation and abolishment of social relations**
While the spirit takes the shape of a camel in the first level of living, the third and last
level, the one Zarathustra manifests, has the form of a child. The child of course
represents the innocent and untreated, a creature that is truly creative, making everything
it meets into objects concerning itself; not only does the child turn its dolls into real
agents and the local forest into a wild jungle in its play. It is also so that everything it
confronts takes place in a self-relating context (– as we know, a child is very self-
centred). Everything in the child’s “sphere” so to say, is of essential concern to it;
likewise as the child’s parents are *there* to nurse the child, the sun is *there* to warm it. As
adults we learn to reflect that other people have their own needs and purposes. We also
learn to differentiate between good and evil, truth and untruth and the like. The child
however, is unaware of any form of guilt and engages in the world purely and directly.
For Nietzsche life is essentially creating and the child creates constantly by relating
everything it confronts to itself, creating meaning, purpose, feelings – everything is a
creation of the child itself. This is not necessarily an intentional act, an action the child is
aware of and wants to carry out. Rather it expresses a focus of life as interpretative
engagement; relating everything confronted to be of central concern for *it*, as a subject.
As such the world is a world of perspectives; nothing exists but relations to a subject; things as they are in themselves are left out of the perspectivistic picture.

Nietzsche gives his epistemological project a description in somewhat programmatic terms: life is put in focus with all its creation, affirmation and redeeming, exceeding all life-denying constrains such as conformity and static-ness. As such Nietzsche advocates a vitalism, *eine lebensphilosophie*, combined with an anti-realist’s perspectivism. Now, we have already seen how subjects are constituted in respect of essentially becoming, taking the ontological picture of a dissolution of identities and static beings into consideration. But what happens with relations to other subjects? In which context does interaction between agents takes place?

Nietzsche thinks of such relations in terms of power, and the categories involved do not allow for a nuanced instantiation of where a subject belongs: either one is master, commanding others, shaping one’s surroundings as one pleases, or one is being mastered, ruled by others, commanded and constrained. Thus one is either in a state of total freedom, crucially creating everything existing, or in a state of total restraint, relying on authorities other than oneself.

Now, this should not be taken to mean that Nietzsche is a “philosopher of the will” in a plain sense, seeing “will to power” as synonymous with a struggle of power between people, and thus an ongoing fight to dominate other people. Advocates for such interpretation overlook that a *desire for power* seems to imply a purpose: whether the struggle for power functions as a means of avoiding suffering, benefit from the taxpayers’ labour or whatnot, there is an aim from where the power-seeking becomes meaningful. Even if power is searched for itself, there is a purpose for the will, namely maximising power; power itself is seen as a goal. But, as has been shown, Nietzsche’s aim is to bring attention to a direction towards *life itself*, not to any speculative, descriptive or normative claims of what life should be about. Hence there is not stated any purposes or goals for life, Nietzsche restrains himself from imposing any meta-level of what life is about. A direction towards *life itself* implies a focus of what life *consists* of, not which purposes or goals there are in life. Likewise, creation is not directed towards anything but itself, creation is not done for the sake of something other or for the achievement of something else.
A non-plain account of power sees power as inflicted with a fundamental redeeming: by becoming master one redeems oneself from relations to others for the sake of becoming truly creative and shaping. It is one’s own affirmation that makes things come true. Independence is therefore regarded as purely positive. In opposition, dependence becomes a danger, functioning as an obstacle for being affirmative and creative. So when Zarathustra seeks solitude in the wilderness and the mountains, this is an act of independence, a redeeming from an embracement of the crowd and an avoidance of the triumph of the bourgeois. Zarathustra’s state of solitude and the following lack of relations is a condition for being truly creative: being bound by relations would mean that he could not be totally self-reliant in his own creations, thus not truly self-affirmative of everything interpreted. Now, freed of relations, Zarathustra’s creations stand out as a sort of squandering, a production without any means and an activity without purpose. Consequently, the setting of absence of relation to other people – Zarathustra’s strive for solitude and the accompanying lack of social situatedness – has some existential implications for how one should understand oneself as being-in-the-world.

The aesthetic ideal prescribes a direction towards the future where focus is centred on becoming, of creating out of the past, the possibility of composing new entities, etc. But this does not come easily: the eminently dynamic and mobile role that the aesthetic ideal proclaims entails that one is not stuck in a relationship with other people which is not self-affirmed. This rules out any possible subjectivity of other persons with the capacity of affirming one’s actions, valuations and thoughts. The disappearance of intersubjective interaction leaves the subject in a totally self-affirming state of being; an exceeding of intersubjectivity has taken place. The same is expressed in the metaphor of weight where Zarathustra represents an ongoing lightness in the continuous overcoming in carrying the dwarf up the mountain and exceeding his lead-dripping thoughts. Every burden is redeemed, all conformity is laid behind to the advantage of a creative focus on becoming; stability and foresight are repudiated for the sake of movement and dynamic.

The point is that it must be hard to fulfil these imperatives. Said in an existential way; to affirm every moment in time is a super-heavy burden that weighs on me; creating
new entities, meanings and values in a *continuous* flow. Normal people can feel despair when confronted with a limited freedom, for instance choosing between which job to choose, which partner to marry, where to settle down and the like. The aesthetic ideal manifested in Zarathustra proposes a much more radical freedom where *every moment* must be redeemed as something wanted; it attributes to the creating subject a responsibility totally unbearable for most people.

The future-directedness is therefore a perspective for the few. The search for solitude, the abandonment of social relations and contempt for the society with its herd-morality and crowd-mentality is a necessity for Zarathustra to become truly creative. Only then is it possible to “become who you are,” being essentially self-affirmative. It would be misleading interpreting Nietzsche as advocating “become who you are” understood as “fulfilling your potential” or “realizing your dreams” as a therapy for the masses – a trend of positivism that can be located in our contemporary as a response to the problems modernity and the lack of authorities involve. Nietzsche – in his elitism – directs himself towards the supreme beings and talks of them in terms of “the free spirits” and “the philosophers of the future”: “After all this do I still need to say that they […] will be free, *very* free spirits, these philosophers of the future – just as surely as they will not be merely free spirits, but something more, higher, greater and thoroughly different […]”.108

Now, this redemption of relations for being truly creative seems only to strengthen the claim of arbitrariness, for what else is a person, totally free of *all* relations but her own self-affirmation, than arbitrary? Before I give more content to this claim, I will consider another approach regarding how a purely creative state can be reached, outlined by Robert Pippin. Although different, this approach also renders a lack of social relations as necessary to become essentially self-affirmative.

*Creation as eros*

Pippin argues that there is a reawakening of a sort of *eros* that should be brought forth for a person to be truly creative. The failure with modernity, the lack of meaning – the

---

108 Nietzsche, BGE, 2003, pp. 71. Italics in original. Nietzsche writes on those groups on many occasions, but see BGE, in particular book II.
nihilism of present-day society – is not due to a power struggle where the weak power (the herd-morality) is allowed the dominant position. We would understand modernity and its degenerating forces better with the use of other images:

Images of death, decay, illness, the absence of tension, a “sleep” of the spirit (he [Nietzsche] sometimes claims that what is needed now is an ability to dream without having to sleep), and perhaps the most intuitive metonymy of failed desire – boredom. These images suggest that the problem of nihilism does not consist in a failure of knowledge or a failure of will, but a failure of desire, the flickering out of some erotic flame.\(^{109}\)

What Nietzsche is occupied with then, according to Pippin, is felt, manifest, concrete and lived phenomena rather then theoretical puzzles regarding knowledge and valuation. The task is not to solve epistemological problems – offering an account of how knowledge, or even truth, can be maintained – but to launch a type of living and an attitude towards life that can exceed the modern. Similarly we cannot uphold an image of the world as intrinsically valueless (after the death of God) and that Nietzsche therefore calls for a spontaneous creativity that, so to say, is about creating meaning in a meaningless world. “Such a possibility is hard to imagine, since no subject, however strong-willed, could simply inject such erotic value ‘into’ the world from a position ‘outside it.’”\(^{110}\) Clearly then, desire is in the world in much the same way as ordinary everyday actions take place in the world. Any postulation of authorities, purposes, goals, etc. from a meta-worldly (over-worldly) standpoint is therefore mistaken. What Pippin seems to suggest is that Nietzsche pursues a strongly ontological orientation in “re-awakening life,” not a metaphysical or over-worldly. We can think of the desire in terms of appetite: appetite comes merely from a desire for something, say grandma’s apple-cake. In my sudden appetite for grandma’s apple-cake I make no considerations about satisfying my hunger or calculating the nutrition of the apple-cake. Nor do I regard the time for eating the cake as appropriate or anything along those lines. The appetite does not even arise from the idea of its good taste. The appetite for the cake arises just because I want it, expressing immediacy. Of course I may have certain expectations of what the cake tastes like. I might even see the cake as suitable for satisfying my hunger. Certainly this can provoke a


\(^{110}\) Pippin, 2003, pp. 16.
lust for the cake, but not an appetite. Appetite is a direct involvement between the subject and the object constituted in an absence of second thoughts; no space is left to consider achievements or effects. The same goes for appetite for physical exercise or sex: it is not worked up because of the expectation of having the muscles stimulated or the body stroked; it expresses urgency. Appetite is a pure wanting, making no expectations of further purposes or effects. The same directness is expressed through Pippin’s somewhat abstract account of eros or desire. The desire does not relate to purpose or creation of meaning of life, but appears directly related to life itself, the individual’s lived life.

Because of the directness of eros it is also hard to pin down what it is supposed to satisfy: “death,” “decay,” “illness,” “absence of tension,” “a sleep of the spirit” and “boredom” are not isolated cases with distinct causes that a desire can fulfil. On the other hand it is clear that the world frustrates us in quite a concrete way, for instance by offering cold and rainy weather, and the like. The themes just mentioned however (death, decay … boredom) are such that they lead to a certain dissatisfaction without referring to any causes with the possibility of being fulfilled. In other words; we are suffering without seeing any reasonable causes. The directness of eros implies a direct connection to the object (the reason for the dissatisfaction), while the non-specificity of the fault of desire (grasped in images of death, decay … boredom) makes sure that we do not deal with distinct, limited cases or faults, which is open for a mere correction. Pippin therefore locates this fault of desire at a deeper level of our existence where “human existence is plagued by a deeper, categorically different dissatisfaction, and so a longing that is not just a response to a lack.”

Thus, the longing cannot be located as a lack of a certain object or as produced by a certain cause, because of its non-specificity; the dissatisfaction is rather upheld by our mere existence. There are existential problems we are confronted with and they are upheld because of us: it is us – human beings – with our longing for “something more,” for happiness and abundance of dissatisfaction, that produces the existential dissatisfaction. Without the search for “something more” the dissatisfaction would not exist. The modern desire is certainly self-negating since dissatisfaction is upheld by its mere wanting, that is, the desire itself is the reason for the felt dissatisfaction: The demanding picture of “something more” in life produces the felt lack.

---

111 Pippin, 2003, pp. 18. Italics in original.
According to Pippin, Nietzsche exemplifies this in a metaphor of a bee: “The odd and somewhat mawkish image Nietzsche often uses to make this point is that of a bee or hive overloaded with honey. The image suggests desires well beyond any need, or a surfeit or abundance of desires (one might even say, desires of ever “more,” for “excess” meaning) that can be communicated and shared.”

Human life then is certainly an excess; it is an overflow of life that no longer responds to any need or function for survival, but because of its distance to such lacks it creates other problems – the dissatisfaction of life – that is merely human. If we can point out any eros – any desire – in such modern life, it is essentially self-refuting by upholding its doomed dissatisfaction, it is degenerating by producing this categorical lack; it is a matter of ressentiment. Excess is in other words no guarantee for reaching a state of self-affirmation. As shown, fulfilling desires might still produce dissatisfaction. Hence redemption from a “wanting for something more” is needed, avoiding a state of apathy where actions become useless since the fundamental dissatisfaction remains intact.

Such a state of apathy can be managed by a reawakening of desire, according to Pippin. An eros – a love of life – must be allowed space within the mythical picture of the will to power:

[T]he natural world is a world without genuine individuality (just mere particularity […]); it is formless, brutal, chaotic, and indifferent, and to live a human life is (and essentially is only) to resist this, to make oneself anything other than this, all because we will not accept it and have found a way to provoke such dissatisfaction in others and for posterity. (Individuality is always a kind of fragile, unstable, threatened achievement, not an original state of being.)

The eros so far considered is seen as a will or a desire to form the formless, creating in chaos and make oneself a subject or an individual where only particularity exists. It reflects an attitude for engagement with the world: a transforming of passivity, an active creation of the existing and a development of subjectivity based on self-involvement and self-engagement. But in spite of this no path showing the way out of the categorical dissatisfaction has yet been offered; the possibility (and maybe even necessity) of a “wanting for something more” in human life still remains, even though we “involve in self-creation” and “form the formless.” In Pippin’s words: “[w]e know […] where we

---

112 Pippin, 2003, pp. 19.
113 Pippin, 2003, pp. 20. Italics in original.
don’t want to be, what would be a kind of spiritual death [being stuck in a mere brutal and chaotic world], without knowing in effect where to go.” While knowing how to avoid a mere particularity, non-individuality and a chaos, we are confronted by the problems involved with the freshly gained individuality. More specifically, any individuality seems to demand “something more” of its existence.

Similar to how the categorical dissatisfaction is upheld by the very wanting of “something more” it too may be exceeded by the creative power the ascetic ideal implies. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes:

Did Prometheus have to fancy (*wähnen*), first that he had stolen the light and then pay for that – before he finally discovered that he had created the light by coveting the light and that not only man but also the god was the work of his own hands and had been mere clay in his hands? All mere images of the maker – no less than fancy, the theft, the Caucasus, the vulture, and the whole tragic *Prometheia* of all seekers after knowledge.\(^\text{115}\)

That “Prometheus had created the light by coveting it” implies that desire has a creative power. But this should not be regarded as a capacity for “making wishes come true.” Creation for Nietzsche is not a response to certain needs or an attempt to fulfil a felt lack or gap. Furthermore, the creation does not begin by a wanting something for oneself, nor as a gift or an offer to someone else (say a community or human beings in general) or a sacrifice for letting something else come true. Creation for Nietzsche is a squandering exceeding any needs, not functioning as a satisfier; it is a sheer surplus. Zarathustra thus expresses his incapability of sacrificing: “Sacrifice what! I squander what is given to me, I, a squanderer with a thousand hands: how could I call that – sacrificing!”\(^\text{116}\)

Much the same is expressed in a passage in *The Twilight of the Idols*: “The genius in work and deed is necessarily a squanderer [*Verschwender*]: that he squanders himself, that is his greatness. The instinct of self-preservation is suspended, as it were; the overpowering pressure of outpouring forces forbids him any such care and caution.”\(^\text{117}\)

The metaphor is chosen to express the non-connectedness of the Nietzschean creator. There is no intentional act behind the doing, no purpose to fulfil or goal to achieve. Zarathustra

---

\(^\text{114}\) Pippin, 2003, pp. 20.
squanders himself when he “talks to his heart” or proclaims his new insights and wisdom because there is no one there to hear his words. He performs true affirmation since the affirmation is done for nothing but affirmation itself. Squandering signifies creation without means and affirmation beyond relations.

For Pippin, the focus on *eros* rules out that there is merely a *spontaneous* creativity that takes place in the passage about Prometheus, as an urge or lust to create. What is at stake is that there is a *desire that creates its very content*. In other words, desire produces what is wanted. The point is that the kind of longing of breaking free from any hold of need or expectations of satisfaction that this desire inspires, can *fail*. Desire does not guarantee a successful production. Hence Pippin talks about the possibility of a “failure of desire,” manifested as dissatisfaction, boredom and apathy in modern life. On the other hand, a successful desire will overcome such degenerating states, affirming desire itself as a trigger for creation.

Admittedly Nietzsche’s writings do not indicate in any precise manner how a desire could turn out a success rather than a failure. But Pippin holds that Nietzsche, through his images of nobility and affirmation, also introduces a concept of a successful or “noble” desire, leading to a victory over modern conformity and existential apathy:

The failure of desire and its experiential manifestations in everyday life – boredom, loneliness, and fatigue – are very hard to diagnose, and extremely hard to respond to […]. And again, sometimes, the extraordinarily enigmatic metaphors and images used by Nietzsche – the eternal return of the same, the spirit of gravity, the pale criminal, a Zoroastrian prophet, a gay science – all seemed mostly to provoke what he has said we need: “neediness” itself; the *expectation* of meaning, and therewith alone the sustenance of a “noble” human desire, a new kind of victory led by Nietzsche over our present “weariness with man.”

A successful engaging desire however – the type of longing that would truly free itself from any need, encapsulating the noble images and manifesting the aesthetic ideal – does not free us from the problem of arbitrariness. Rather, the Nietzschean master – the affirmative subject that creates out of a squandering, initiated by desire free of any need – is not bound to anything, nor is it limited in any means, in its creation. Crucially then; this can hardly be thought of as a “higher level” of being. Rather, the lack of relations seems to lead to an even greater meaninglessness, boredom and decay.

---

The abandonment of relations and the highlighting of solitude to be truly creative makes sense since creations must rely on the creator only, freed from boundaries of others’ opinion. Self-affirmation implies that interpretations and creations rely on nothing but the subject itself, thus subjects stand out as arbitrary in their interpretations. Now, the problem of arbitrariness turns out to be two-headed: firstly, any meaningful, intelligible social interaction seems impossible since any thing confronted is self-affirmed, hence wanted, shaped and given meaning and content of the interpretive subject. Confronted with Zarathustra then, I, as a subject, am in no power to affect his conception of me – Zarathustra stands freely and independently of interpreting both his perceptions and their meaning. Hence any mutual understanding and intelligible interaction is rendered impossible. Secondly, such total independence seems to lead to boredom and lack of meaning. For what do creations and interpretations matter if not acknowledge, recognised and accepted by other beings? Nietzsche’s analogy connecting Zarathustra with the child seems to lose hold at this point; for even though the child may be self-relating in every situation with which it interacts, it will still run to its parents from time to time, i.e. it will carry its drawings to have them acknowledged and thereby be accepted as autonomous subject. Thus, maintaining relation to other subjects seems to be a vital ingredient in avoiding boredom and decay. A more detailed discussion is pursued in the following.

Creation and the problem of arbitrariness

To start with an objection of the attempt to attach the problem of arbitrariness to Nietzsche’s writing, it might be held that the stress of creation in Nietzsche’s authorship as outlined above is rather misunderstood. Recalling the discussion of the aesthetic ideal in chapter 2, one could argue that what Nietzsche proclaims is not creation as an arbitrary feature, but creation as an affirmative attitude towards life as an opposition of stability and conformity. – The main goal is to fight the degenerating forces, putting life itself, life as affirmative yes-saying, back on stage. Thus affirmation and creation do take part in a relation; creation becomes a crusade, an overcoming and a victory against ressentiment, it is a creation that is not purely arbitrary, but which prescribes an affirmative attitude in opposition to a degenerating form of life.
This objection however, is not likely to find support in Nietzsche’s texts. Admittedly a critique of modern life is a topic Nietzsche devotes much space to, but this critique does not belong to the level of living where true creation is executed.\textsuperscript{119} In this chapter we have so far considered the first level pictured by the camel and the Spirit of Heaviness and the third level through the image of the child. The second level however is depicted as a fight, and the symbol is a lion that violently attacks its enemy. The enemy is given the name “Thou shalt,” with clear address to universalism in general and the categorical imperative in particular. The lion fights for freedom from this Kantian constraint, it wants to become lord in its own kingdom; the type of values allowed in its own life should flow from a decision made by the lion itself. The lion represents the aesthetic ideal in opposition to and fighting \textit{ressentiment}: “Thou shalt” is opposed to the lion’s “I will.” A yes-saying and affirmation takes the place of obedience and herd morality. Authority is placed within oneself or within one’s power rather than in something external and foreign. But Nietzsche states quite explicitly that this does not suffice for a true creation to take place:

My brothers, why is the lion needed in the spirit? Why does the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, not suffice? \textit{To create new values – that even the lion cannot yet do:} but to create for itself freedom for new creation – that is within the power of the lion. To create freedom for oneself and a sacred Nay even to duty: for that, my brothers, the lion is needed.\textsuperscript{120}

At the level of true creation, even being in opposition must be exceeded. Being in opposition implies that something is put up against something else, thus judging something as more valuable than something else: hence measurement or valuation takes place in a \textit{relation}; thus the victorious valuation of the lion is not intrinsically good, it is only \textit{better}. True affirmation however, demands an overcoming of such comparisons, the affirmation must take place for its own sake, not as a better alternative to something else: “even my own hatred I hated,” states Zarathustra, because it prevented him from reaching “the Heaven above me” – a symbol of something truly light and affirmative. Feelings that occur essentially because of relation to other entities cannot be affirmative. \textit{True affirmation must not be done for something else, but be essentially self-relating. If

\textsuperscript{120} Nietzsche, Z, 2005, pp. 24. My italics.
Zarathustra for instance was creating new values for the sake of gaining control over the human race, the creation would function as a means of fulfilling other purposes. The creation would be related to a higher good, to other achievements than the creation itself. But since the creation of new values is itself a direct connection to life, one should not affirm this creation by means of other effects, but through the creation itself. Affirmation becomes a self-relating relationship. The relation to other things is of no importance. Consequently one may ask how affirmative a hate towards one’s own hate can be.

Clearly this seems like another instantiation of the type of paradoxes that Nietzsche’s text are full of and which is articulated with the problem of self-reference. I will not pursue a discussion of the paradox here, only state that it is not the hate towards one’s own hate that opens the possibilities for affirmation ( – that is more of a polemic point, a rhetorical form that Nietzsche makes use of to express himself). To be purely affirmative redemption must take place, an overcoming of relational proportions. This includes that any critique (even the one symbolised with the lion) must be overcome. The lion’s fight for freedom to pose itself as lord in its own life is not essentially something affirmative since its fight for freedom ultimately is bound and related to the suppression of freedom by the “thou shalt.” The creation of new values requires an exceeding of the constraint of relational circumstances; it requires innocence, a yes-saying and pure affirmation, that is, an affirmation of the affirmative attitude itself.

An insistence on a “freeing of bonds and relations to others” certainly has crucial implications. Not only does the absence of relations lead to a total arbitrariness of the (self-created) subject (– Zarathustra, as a manifestation of pure affirmation, is pure self-determination when we see that creation of values is based on no other premises than his own affirmation). The total self-affirmation that values rely on must also produce an emptiness; the creations of Zarathustra have no constraints. Nothing possessing authority sets limits for Zarathustra’s creation, which clearly undermines any meaningful interaction between subjects, since any interpretation of any object depends on the subject’s creation of its content, meaning and being. Every object becomes subjected to an ultimate and total arbitrariness. Worse, the supposedly liberating affirmative attitude seems to regenerate degenerating forces in society. With the dissolution of relations there

---

can be no responsibility towards any other subject, nor any recognition or affirmation of the actions that are taken. As already described as a fault of modern society, lack of authorities leads to a lack of meaning, but the same thing seems to happen when no constraints are laid on the creative subject: in a creation, say a totally arbitrary interpretation of a text, it is hard to see how it should have any significance since the interpretation refers to nothing else than itself. It makes no references to other interpretations and seeks no acknowledgement of other persons, since that would have been a conforming and degenerating action. Nietzsche’s stress on being purely affirmative rules out any connection to other persons or entities. But when creation is done for its own affirmation and the relation to any other subjectivity is laid behind, the implication that *nothing really matters* seems to follow. In opposition to the Spirit of Heaviness that wants to pull everything down, proclaiming that nothing will succeed and, by such claims, producing apathy, the project of total self-affirmation seems to lead to a lightness where no weight remains and where no possible objection is redeemed. The result is anyway a production of the same lack of meaning – there is nothing that matters – boredom and apathy are again dominant. While Pippin identifies such symptoms in the *failure* of desire, a *successful* desire that opens the possibilities of pure affirmation seems to produce the same symptoms.

**Hermeneutics as condition for interpretation**

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* we can find a passage that can shed light on the problems involved with a pure affirmation. Zarathustra here quotes the “sentimental hypocrites”:

“And let this be for me the *immaculate* perception for all things: That I want nothing from things, except that I may lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes.” – Oh, you sentimental hypocrites, you lechers! You lack innocence in your desire, so now you slander desiring itself! Verily, not as creators, procreators, or enjoyers of becoming do you love the earth! Where is innocence? Where there is the will to procreate. And whoever wants to create beyond himself, he has for me the purest will.¹²²

In account of the aesthetic ideal the quotation seems straightforward: the believers in pure knowledge and of immaculate perception do not demand anything but an observation of whatever observed. True knowledge is achieved when the perception is *clear*, when a

synopsis can be maintained regarding what is at stake. Hence any *involvement* by the observer (the interpreter) is to be avoided. True knowledge is rather achieved by the absence of engagement. – This is the position held by the cowards and the lechers, according to Nietzsche. The aesthetic ideal on the other hand welcomes such engagement; affirmation of life prescribes a participation and a creation of the known. Desire is not to be avoided but maintained in the perception to let creativity bloom and life be affirmed. As such the passage seems to argue for a shift of level of being-in-the-world, where the conforming *immaculate perception* attitude is redeemed by a creative and affirmative attitude. But read at the level of pure affirmation and creation, manifested in Zarathustra, it looks as though Nietzsche does not think that such affirmation could be self-sufficient or immanently affirmed.

Nietzsche’s claim is that the conceiver, which in this other approach is the affirmative creator – say, Zarathustra himself – should not “lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes.” But the self-affirmative affirmer, the creator who sees no boundaries of his own creations but his own affirmation, does mirror himself in such a way: everything confronted is formed as the affirmative subject pleases, the subject recognises only its own affirmation in all that surrounds him; thus “a mirroring with a hundred eyes” does take place for the Zarathustra-character. – The self-affirmative creator carries an element of narcissism in that it reflects its own will in every confronted object and every present moment.

In the passage above Nietzsche seems to oppose such an attitude. Creations should go *beyond* oneself, thus beyond any self-affirmative mirroring and consequently exceed *oneself*. The insistence on *beyond* indicates precisely a reach that precedes the self-affirmative loop. But how is this possible? How do we go beyond the self-affirmative loop after Nietzsche’s argumentation of an essential creation loaded with the subject’s “thus I will it” – the subject’s affirmation of its creations?

The insistence on creation certainly implies that the subject permeates any experience. But this does not necessarily mean that the confronting object (in the experience) is something identical with the subject, as a manifestation of the subject’s desire or an outcome of an intentional creation. In the sphere of hermeneutics it is of
central concern that events have the characteristic of being *confronting*, thus placing us in front of something *foreign*.

In the context of perspectivism however, in spite of the description of “experience” as something foreign, the concept should not be taken to escape the perspectivistic sphere as an event-in-itself, a happening in “the outer world.” Experiences certainly take place within one’s own perspective (how could experiences be possible otherwise?) but still have a confronting and foreign appearance, as something the subject could not predict or at least not produce. Objects confronted in experience are therefore not purely a “creation of the subject,” even though they are encapsulated by the perspectivistic thesis: recalling the discussion in chapter 1 we know that thinking of objects as they are-in-themselves is itself an intolerable position.

That there is something that confronts us certainly implies that there is some resistance, something foreign to us, something not identical with ourselves that we relate to. Hence, read in the light of hermeneutics, any experience referred to by the Nietzschean affirmative subject takes place in a *relation* after all, a relation constituted by the subject confronted with something foreign. It might be held that the subject permeates the experience in means of forming, shaping and interpreting it in light of the subject’s own background (former experiences, valuations, attitudes and the like) or *horizon* in Gadamer’s terms, so that the interpreting subject becomes crucial for the outcome of the situation. But to say that the subject is crucial for the outcome is only to hold that one ingredient is crucial for the outcome of the mixture of two ingredients. It might look arbitrary that the subject shapes the object confronted in experience, but being *shaping* in this structure is only to make a meaningful–hence understandable content to the event: without a form of “shaping,” interpretation would become impossible; thus “shaping” the object is necessary for a subject to have experiences. What is more, this structure is certainly not arbitrary: that the confronting object necessitates a shaping means that something *new* is created, a new intelligible structure arises, something that was not but yet becomes. But then again, there is something *added in* the creating subject – a new attribute and a new interpretation of an experience is included in the subject’s horizon. Thus the full content of the interpretation cannot have existed ready-made and in advance in the subject. Admittedly the interpretation of the object relies heavily upon the subject,
but this is a mutual relation; the object is also shaping the subject since the subject gains new experiences thorough its interpretation.

That we are confronted by something foreign in experience implies that it is not met with conformity. Nietzsche’s achievement is a description of creativity as a mode of being. Now, this creativity does not imply a total arbitrariness since it unfolds in a structure of mutual influence: the object is allowed to shape the subject as much as the subject shapes the object. Let us pursue this a little more: in an interpretation meaning is created out of an event. Hence, the creation of meaning presupposes an interpretation, involving an interaction between subject and object. Such interaction therefore structures any possible interpretation. Hence, creations – an establishment of meaning, that is, interpretations – takes place in a relationship; namely the structure of interaction. In the light of hermeneutics then, the structure (the interaction where the object is formed by the subject and vice versa) functions as a condition for creation. The affirmative affirmer thus should not be conceived as totally solitary, free of all relations. The possibilities of creating (creating meaning; interpreting) necessitates an interaction with something foreign, thus there is nothing like a totally arbitrary, relation-free creation.

Now, what is the upshot of this last point? The sceptic might agree in that creations and interpretations take part in a sort of relation in this particular meaning, but still hold that arbitrariness composes a problem for Nietzsche since nothing is given of the outcome of such creations. We live in a way with the same uncertainty of the outcome of our interpretations, nothing is fixed and life may turn out unstable in spite of the (small) comfort in knowing that interpretations occur against the background of an interaction. This might be true, however, the “uncertainty” mentioned by the sceptic would have other connotations in other approaches. In hermeneutics for instance, the terminology would be “openness in the interpretation,” rendering the “uncertainty” as something positive, leaving experiences principally open for further interpretations, avoiding the thought of a “final” or “complete” interpretation. In Nietzsche’s approach, the “uncertainty” would highlight “particularity in the interpretation” abandoning “universality, conformity and rigidity” in interpretation. In other words, the “uncertainty” of the outcome of an interpretation is welcomed in Nietzsche’s project. It sets the stage
for genuine interpretations – a responsibility of a truly engaging and creative activity of
the subject and an overcoming of old and conforming ways of thinking.
Conclusion

There is no space for compromises in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Either one is redeeming, affirmative and creative or one is conform, static and life-denying. If one is not being mastering, giving meaning to interpretations and affirming their content, one must be mastered, constrained and condemned to accept others valuations. Thus conformist subjects cannot really affirm anything; they only adopt other authority’s valuation, whether this be Christian morality or the philosophical tradition’s conceptualisation and search for truth. The creative subject on the other hand constantly affirms its own will by relating everything to itself, thus interpretations become expressions of one’s own will. The lack of compromises has consequences for Nietzsche’s polemical form. Not only does he stand out as a harsh and crucial criticiser of the philosophical tradition, he also seems to launch radical ontological theses about the world’s constitution and human existence without offering any support or justification for these claims.

Two immediate responses would naturally be either a total abandonment, rendering Nietzsche’s statements as pure rhetoric without foundation, or an enthusiastic engagement, taking Nietzsche to offer a proper description of the world. The compromising response would be to take Nietzsche’s statements sincerely, treating them with benevolence and at the same time remain critical regarding their validity, searching for justification in order to consider the position as plausible. I am convinced that the latter response is necessary to adopt in order to achieve more than a naïve conception of Nietzsche’s philosophical thoughts. Only through a critical engagement can a deeper understanding of this peculiar authorship be achieved.

The topic of this dissertation has been two highly critical and complex questions related to Nietzsche’s philosophy, namely the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference. As has been shown, the problem of self-reference arises from the difficulty of holding perspectivism as a philosophical position, for if perspectivism implies that
everything is interpretations and thus could justifiably have been rendered otherwise than the actual, perspectivism itself seems to be only one among many available theories of approaching life and the world. The problem of arbitrariness reflects problems that arise if we adopt perspectivism as a position. For if every interpretation is dependent upon which perspective we hold, and every person is capable of inhabiting their subjective view upon the topic conceived, interpretations seem to diverge from subject to subject, thus any intersubjective, mutual understanding becomes an illusion. So while the problem of arbitrariness arises with the use of perspectivism as a method, the problem of self-reference reflects how the perpsectivistic theorems’ application to itself as a position, becomes problematic. Now the complexity of these questions can be outlined roughly in three points.

Firstly, the problem of arbitrariness is not only launched from the epistemological realists’ point of view. Admittedly, accepting an anti-realist’s thesis would mean that a thought of truth as connected to an objective world dissolves. Any truth then can only be thought of as gathered and created by the human sphere. As we saw in Habermas, truth could be seen as achieved by human labour, constituted within the frames of civilisation. But Nietzsche gives far more radical implications of this abolishment of objective truths; instead of using his critical view upon “objective truths” to explore how truths are conditioned by us, Nietzsche does precisely the opposite, rendering truth as ultimately subjectivistic, relying on the individual perspective only. Thus interpretations in general, exemplified by a conception of truth, lead to intolerable arbitrariness.

The same structure follows for the problem of self-reference. In response to the demand for justification in holding the perspectivistic position, the perspectivist could reply that it is exactly such belief in foundations that perspectivism wants to avoid. Grounding arguments for perspectivism on solid foundations would mean a break with the position itself. Perspectivism is advocating a “redirection towards life” and this implies that conform and passé requirements for foundation are left out of the picture. But the problem of such statements is that they do not escape relativism; by downplaying rational, argumentative-based thinking for the rightness of the alternative approach one gives priority to any view as long as it starts from ontological claims. Moreover, such
claims seem to be essentially connected to subjectivistic perspectives, leading right back to the problem of arbitrariness.

Secondly, we could consider the problem of arbitrariness as external or immanent. Externally understood is the question posed from outside the perspectivistic sphere, questions that have to be addressed if perspectivism wants to be taken seriously. Critics from this hold do not feel inclined by thesis or implications of Nietzsche’s perspectivism, but pin-point what they see as intolerable consequences of the outcome of this position; interpreters as autonomous subjects apply different interpretations of the same topic that are equally justified – thus interpretations become an arbitrary feature. The objection to this way of putting the argument is not directed towards the critics’ lack of inclination of the perspectivist’s thesis, but that they fail in taking the ontology into consideration. For Nietzsche a redirection towards life implies that we render the becoming of things essential, hence a concept of entities as stable and self-identical beings is abandoned. This means that a concept of autonomous subjects does not fit the perspectivistic picture. Subjects must rather be conceived as essentially dynamic and changeable directed towards becoming and the future. The same goes for objects or entities; they are not something stable and conform, suitable for “objective” examinations or interpretations, presupposed by the claimants of the problem of arbitrariness. Consequently then, the objection of this way of posing the problem of arbitrariness is that it is based on a metaphysical belief that the perspectivist could not accept. Thus the critique does not actually grasp Nietzsche’s aim or intention and escapes the field of sound critiques. It simply stresses a few aspects or doctrines involved in the perspectivist’s thesis and criticises it for not fitting with another ontology; the ontology the objectors hold in advance. By holding presuppositions that the perspectivist could not accept, the critique cannot be rendered sound.

Thirdly, the problem of arbitrariness can also be rendered as immanent to Nietzsche’s position, thus avoiding the difficulties outlined above. The claim in this statement of the problem is that even if one accepts Nietzsche’s ontology and follows his insistence of being a creative subject this also leads to depressing arbitrariness. As has been shown, Nietzsche proclaims an intense creation to overcome degenerating, conforming ways of thinking and valuating. Being creative means to adopt an essentially
self-affirmative attitude. By relating everything confronted to oneself, letting all interpretations be a matter of one’s own will it becomes possible to achieve a radical redeeming of all conformity – no constraints exist for one’s own willing. The only maintaining reference for an interpretation is oneself. Now, a total self-affirmation seems to produce an emptiness since there are no constraints for the creations: no authority sets limits for the self-affirmative person’s creation. This clearly undermines any meaningful interaction between subjects, since any interpretation of any object depends on the subject’s creation of its content. Every object becomes subjected to an ultimate and total arbitrariness. As explained, the supposedly liberating affirmative attitude seems to regenerate degenerating forces by abandoning relations to other people. Without such relations there can be no responsibility towards any other subject, nor any recognition or affirmation of the actions that are taken. Thus a self-affirmative activity seems to lead to the same meaninglessness and apathy in life that Nietzsche’s “redirection towards life” attempts to overcome.

As I have proposed, a reading of Nietzsche in the light of hermeneutics escapes the problem of arbitrariness: a total arbitrariness is rendered false since even creative, self-affirmative subjects are admitted having experiences; having experiences implies that something is confronting the subject, something with the characteristic of being foreign, thus a non-self-willed entity. A relation can be submitted after all then, between the interpretive subject and the confronting object. Now, this does not rule out that an interpreter could be arbitrary to a certain degree. My suggestion only holds that the thought of a totally arbitrary, self-affirmative interpreter must be avoided; since interpretations do not lie solely with the interpretative subject, we can conclude that a foreign “something” (whatever one is confronted by) conditions the interpretation. This is as far as my arguments goes.

A further development regarding the problem of arbitrariness could be to investigate what sort of features must be attributed to this “foreign something” that confronts us in experience. What does it take to inhabit this role? How is it constituted? How precisely does the “foreign something” condition the interpretation? These are questions that remain untouched in this paper. Another quest would be to explore to what extent a *degree* of arbitrariness would match with the original meaning of arbitrariness.
outlined here, and how this would constitute a problem for Nietzsche’s philosophy. These questions constitute possibilities for a further investigation.

One could make an overall argument against the whole structure of this dissertation, questioning how fruitful it is to treat the problems of arbitrariness and self-reference as isolated problems, considered independently of the different textual contexts of where they appear. In my opinion, giving the questions such treatment gains valuable insights since it allows us to see the generality of the problems and the deeper implications that follow. By bringing the discussion up to a general level it is also easier to outline the arguments’ strength- and weaknesses and thereby consider their plausibility. Equally important is it to realise that even though the problems certainly instantiate in specific textual sections or paragraphs, their full weight can only be conceived in the light of an overall account of Nietzsche’s perspectivism and his philosophical project.
Bibliography


