

'matter-less' force-points, but the breadth of his conception of the will to power shares more than simply grandeur with Democritus's own 'grand idea'. Democritus, in going *beyond* materialism even in one of its first inceptions, offered above all, a *method* of philosophising that allowed for both critical, sceptical thinking, *and* the construction of hypotheses about the world. Democritus, arguably much more than either Lange or Schopenhauer, *united* Nietzsche's scientific and aesthetic sensibilities, and it is this *overturning* of the disjunction between art and science, perhaps more than anything else he learns from his work on Democritus, that will remain at the heart of Nietzsche's own philosophy.

The Individual and Individuality in Nietzsche

NUNO NABAIS

The pessimistic condemnation of life by Schopenhauer is a moral one. Transference of herd standards into the realm of metaphysics. The "individuum" meaningless (...). We are paying for the fact that science has not understood the individuum.

Friedrich Nietzsche
Posthumous Fragments (1887), 9 (84); *The Will to Power*, § 379¹

The Nietzschean project of the *revaluation of all values* is the attempt to invert the perspective on nature and the dynamic of each individual being. For Nietzsche, nihilism is the extreme outcome of a primacy conferred on the *universal*, whether the viewpoint is ontological, as with the One (in the figures of the Platonic *Idea*, the *Divine Substance* of Spinoza, the *Spirit* of Hegel or the *One Will* of Schopenhauer, within which the particular is delimited as a mere copy, mode, moment or phenomenon), or epistemological, as with the Form or Law which endows singular phenomena with truth and intelligibility, or, finally, ethical, as with the Good, the Moral Law or the Common Interest which determines the value of individual actions. Nihilism appears as the result

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA), eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Verlag de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1967, XII, 9 (84); Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. by W. Kaufmann, trans. by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), § 379. In the quotations from Nietzsche's *oeuvre* that follow, the following will be indicated: a) for the posthumous writings, the volume number in the *Werke* and the number of the fragment [*Ed. note: where the passage has been translated in The Will to Power (henceforth WP), the KSA reference will be followed by the number of the section in The Will to Power in which the passage is found*]; b) for texts published in Nietzsche's lifetime, the title of the work in English, the volume number in the *Werke* and the page number. Where no English translation is noted, the passage has been translated by the editors.

of the discovery of the “all too human” nature that underlies all figures of the universal: from that moment on, the individual is perceived as without foundation — all phenomena are chaotic and all actions are vain. The collapse of the One, the Truth and the Good — condensed by Nietzsche into the theme of the “death of God” — of the centre of gravity of the human essence, of human knowledge and the human will — jeopardises the inherent stability of each individual.

For Nietzsche, the *inversion of values* is not merely the affirmation of the radically individual character of each being, refusing the thesis of a self-existent Universal or a separate Being: it is also the search within each individual, in an immanent fashion, for his own individuality — his own individual law of connection between all of his predicates, states and modifications, constituting at one and the same time the foundation of his life-history (and therefore of his radical self-destination) and his internal principle of differentiation vis-à-vis all other individuals.

Nietzsche thus stands in the line of thinkers who, like Aristotle or Leibniz, attribute ontological primacy to the individual. He declares tirelessly: “There are only individuals”,² only the individual being is a real being, or, as Leibniz put it, “ce qui n'est pas véritablement un être, n'est pas non plus véritablement un être”.³

Nonetheless, and as is the case with all the other fundamental concepts of Nietzsche's ontology, we will seek in vain in his work for any explicit account of the concept of the individual.⁴ This circumstance, although due in part to the non-systematic character of his thought, will, we believe, become more intelligible viewed in the context both of Nietzsche's debt to Schopenhauer and of the internal points of breakage that appeared in his ontology over the seventeen years of his philosophical production.

² Nietzsche, KSA, IX, 6 (158).

³ G. W. Leibniz, letter to Arnauld of 30.4.1687, *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 97.

⁴ The absence of an explicit account of the concept of the individual in Nietzsche has led some commentators to read the theory of the will to power as the negation of a true individuation, in which an undifferentiated continuum prevails. Eugen Fink, in *Nietzsches Philosophie* (French trans., Hildenberg, Minuit, Paris, 1965) even declares: ‘The world is not composed of things, it is a single flux of life, a “sea” in which there are waves but nothing is permanent’ (p. 207), and, again: ‘Starting out from a basic conception of being as becoming, Nietzsche denies the individual, finite being. There is no such thing as a being because, in the end, there is no such thing as individuation’ (p. 210).

The present study will therefore aim, in the first place, to outline, in its essential features, the influence of Schopenhauer's theory of individuation on Nietzsche's conception of the individual over the period from 1872 to 1885, and then, in the second place, to propose, as far as is possible, a systematic analysis of the new formulation of the problem of individuation and individuality which appears with the theory of the will to power.

While the attempt will be made to stress, in the context of the development of Nietzsche's thought, the superiority of the later formulation, there will certainly be no question of considering it to be the solution to the problem which it is intended to answer; what it does allow is, we believe, the supersession of the paradoxes which Nietzsche inherited from Schopenhauer's metaphysics and the laying of a basis for his project of the *inversion of all values*, that is, the ethical and ontological justification of the individual existence.

Nietzsche did not resolve the problem of a determination of the individual which would be simultaneously intrinsic and exhaustive. But then again, has anybody resolved it?

I. Meditation on the individual in the period prior to the theory of the will to power

I. 1. The paradox of individuality in Schopenhauer

The essential incommunicability between *individuality* (*Individualität*) and *individuation* (*Individuation*) is one of the crucial paradoxes of Schopenhauer's metaphysics; indeed, it is probably the aspect which created the most obstacles to the autonomous development of Nietzsche's theory of the individual.

Schopenhauer defines the principle of individuation in exclusively spatial and temporal terms: a single individual cannot have two beginnings of existence in time, and, similarly, two individuals cannot occupy the same space simultaneously. He even goes so far as to call space and time the “*principium individuationis*”, on the grounds that, in his words, ‘it is only by means of time and space that something which is one and the same according to its nature and its concept appears as different, as a plurality of co-existent and successive things’.⁵ Following

⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*), *Samtliche Werke*, I, § 23. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft,

Kant, he denies to space and time the character of real determinants of the objects of experience: there is, then, for him no objective principle of differentiation between two individuals, or between two moments of the same individual.

However, in addition to *phenomenal individuation*, Schopenhauer affirms, for every human being, a real individuality, which is the mark of his uniqueness and the foundation of the identity of his existence in time, beyond the diversity of forms. This individuality is explicitly conceived by Schopenhauer starting out from the model of *Kant's concept of the "intelligible character"*, as employed in the solution of the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as a means of reconciling the mathematical regularity of phenomena in time with human freedom.⁶ Schopenhauer adopts the Kantian solution, considering it, indeed, to be the point at which critical philosophy becomes the introduction to his metaphysics of the will,⁷ but he interprets as a *thing* what in Kant was merely a *law*: in fact, he reifies the "*intelligible character*", identifying it as being the will as it manifests itself in each individual. Thus, the *thing-in-itself* — more than a problematic concept, an ideal correlate of the unity of apperception — manifests itself, in Schopenhauer's view, in an immediate and intuitive fashion in each individual as his will. However — and it is here that the paradox enters — this reification of the *thing-in-itself* implies that, as embodied in a multiplicity of particularised wills, it becomes subject to space and time, to the exclusive forms of phenomena. To the thesis of the unity of the will, as *thing-in-itself*, beyond the multiplicity of its spatio-temporal embodiments — and this is the central thesis of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will — falls, then, the task of superseding the contradiction. From the empirical viewpoint, there is no real distinction between individuals who are numerically distinct; not only this, but the very existence of the multiple is viewed as *phenomenal* and, as such, a matter of appearance. Consequently, the individual in general is henceforth, paradoxically, considered, on the one hand, as a dual embodiment of the *thing-in-itself* (as "*intelligible character*", and as will), and, on the other, as a pure phenomenon. Empirically, then, the

Darmstadt, 1928, p. 173. English translation by E.F. Payne (Dover 1969), p. 113.

⁶ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft)*, Ak B 473/ A 445 and ff.

⁷ 'The solution of the third antinomy, whose subject was the idea of freedom, merits special consideration insofar as for us it is very remarkable that Kant is obliged precisely here, in connexion with the Idea of Freedom, to speak in greater detail about the thing in itself'. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, S.W., I, p. 672. (English trans. p. 501.)

individual is not a real particular, and is not endowed with individuality.

What then, for Schopenhauer, is the real foundation of the individuality of each human individual — which, following Kant, he recognises as constituting the condition of the possibility of any judgment of imputability, and, therefore, of that individual's ethical nature? His metaphysics provides no answer to this question. Schopenhauer is clearly aware of this when, in one of his last works, he writes: '*Individuality* does not rest on the *principio individuationis* alone and therefore is not through and through mere *appearance*. Rather, it is rooted in the thing in itself, in the will of the individual: for its character is itself the individual. How deep its roots go here, however, belongs to the question which I do not attempt to answer'.⁸

Only from the viewpoint of intelligibility does there exist an absolute criterion of individual differentiation. On the simple level of representation, no distinction exists that is not numerical.

This paradox of individuation has major ethical consequences. For Schopenhauer, precisely because as regards the multiplicity of individual wills there is no such thing as real difference, the continuing conflict between wills that struggle for their own self-preservation is, essentially, bereft of foundation.

From the viewpoint of the *thing-in-itself*, it is the same will, one and indivisible, that devours itself. It follows that, for Schopenhauer, injustice can be transcended and the plane of appearances superseded only if each subject erases his own individuality and his own individual will and becomes a pure subject of knowledge.

1.2. Individuation, between the aesthetic and the ethical

The works of Nietzsche's first period (1872-1878) are profoundly marked by this paradox of individuality of Schopenhauer's metaphysics: they adopt the fundamental distinction between the *thing-in-itself* and the *phenomenon*, in much the same way as Schopenhauer, in his fashion (constituting it as the paradigm for a series of oppositions — one/multiple, essence/existence, reality/appearance), had taken it over from Kant. In the first chapter of *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872, Nietzsche clearly sets out the metaphysical principles which are his starting-point: 'Philosophical natures even have a presentiment that hidden beneath the reality in which we live and have our being there also

⁸ Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, S.W., V, p. 270.

lies a second, quite different reality; in other words, this reality too is a semblance'.⁹ In another passage, he goes so far as to call that appearance 'Wahrhaft-Nichtseiende'.¹⁰ This avowal of the unreal nature of the forms of space and time under which the existence of every individual being is played out will also have crucial consequences for Nietzsche's meditations on the individual and individuality. In Nietzsche's eyes, the empirical individual is, inevitably, doubly unfounded — both in his particular dimension, before the One of the universal will of which he is only an ephemeral manifestation, and in his singular dimension, before his own individuality, his individual essence, which reduces his empirical action to a mere imperfect and chaotic copy of the intelligible law which it embodies.

The Birth of Tragedy is, indeed, constructed, through the figures of Dionysus and Apollo, around the opposition between the One and the Multiple, while the *Untimely Meditations*, especially the third, entitled *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), mark the attempt to transcend the radical incommunicability between individuality and empirical individuation.

However, like all great disciples, Nietzsche is no mere repeater of his master. These works already adumbrate a process of rupture with Schopenhauer, manifested in the search for a justification of the empirical individual existence: Nietzsche thus breaks not only with Schopenhauer over the definition of the *principium individuationis*, but also concerning the ethical consequences of the absence of a real empirical correlative for individuality. Thus, while admitting that individual existence amounts to an injustice in the face of the One, Nietzsche, instead of following Schopenhauer in proposing a process of ascetic negation of the individual will, endeavours to justify the plane of appearance itself, and, therefore, the empirical existence of each individual. He does this by setting up a dialectical tension between Truth and Appearance, the vision of the One and the affirmation of the truth, knowledge of the Intelligible and apology for the Empirical. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, for instance, if the Dionysiac ecstasy represents the state of ascetic fusion with the "Primal One" (*das Ur-Ein*), which, as

⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie)*, §1, KSA I, pp. 26-27 English Translation in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p.15.

¹⁰ 'We, however, who consist of and are completely trapped in semblance, are compelled to feel this semblance to be that which truly is not (*Wahrhaft-Nichtseiende*), i.e. a continual Becoming in time, space, and causality — in other words, empirical reality.' *ibid.* §4, KSA I, pp. 38-39. (Speirs translation, p.26)

Schopenhauer had said, is attained through the disinterested contemplation of the Whole beyond all individual motivation,¹¹ that same ecstasy is nonetheless counterbalanced by the figure of Apollo, 'the magnificent divine image (*Götterbild*) of the *principium individuationis*', as Nietzsche significantly calls him,¹² who represents the endeavour, through apology for the forms of appearance and dream, to justify the individualised character of human existence.¹³ For Nietzsche, the mystery of Greek tragedy lies in the presence within it of that tension between the One, manifested in mystic union with the universe in the Dionysiac delirium, and the Multiple, embodied in the characters' struggle for the heroic affirmation of their individuality.

Similarly, in the third of the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche endeavours to justify the empirical existence of each individual, on the basis of an imputed, equally empirical, individuality. He adopts an interior viewpoint, conceiving the individual in both particular and singular terms, starting out from, precisely, his individuality. Right at the beginning, he defines each individual as a "unique miracle" (*ein einmaliges Wunder*), endowed with an absolute "uniqueness" (*Einzigkeit*). This uniqueness, viewed as, indeed, the "core of his being" (*der Kern seines Wesen*), is, additionally, conceived in accordance with the model of "intelligible character". This is the "fundamental law" (*Grundgesetz*) which constitutes the principle of individuality and confers uniqueness on each individual's life-history, since it regulates the form of its manifestation.¹⁴ However, while following Schopenhauer in admitting

¹¹ 'If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy which arises from the innermost ground of man, indeed of nature itself, whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the *Dionysiac*, which is best conveyed by the analogy of *intoxication*. (...) Now, hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him, as if the veil of *maya* had been torn apart, so that mere shreds of it flutter before the mysterious primordial unity (*das Ur-Ein*)', Nietzsche, *ibid.* §1, KSA I, p. 30. (Speirs translation, p.18)

¹² 'One might even describe Apollo as the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis*, whose gestures and gaze speak to us of all the intense pleasure, wisdom and beauty of 'semblance'', *ibid.* §1, KSA I, p. 28. (Speirs translation, p.17)

¹³ 'As an ethical divinity Apollo demands measure from all who belong to him and, so that they may respect that measure, knowledge of themselves', *ibid.* §4, KSA I, p. 40. (Speirs translation, p.27)

¹⁴ 'But how do we regain ourselves? How can man know himself? He is a dark and concealed thing [...]. The young soul looks back upon life with the question: what have you until now truly loved? What does your soul have to do with the series of these venerated objects in front of you? Perhaps through their essence and their

the inconstant and inauthentic nature of the empirical existence of each individual, Nietzsche does not repudiate that existence: rather, he seeks to imbue it with dignity and intelligibility, by purifying it of its empirical determinations in such a way as to convert it into an exact mirror of the individuality which it incarnates: 'Be yourself! The totality of what you are is not what you do, think, desire'.¹⁵

In both of these works, whether from the viewpoint of individuation or from that of individuality, Nietzsche aims to move beyond the sentence imposed on individual existence by Schopenhauer; nonetheless, he is, at this stage, still the prisoner of the paradigms of the metaphysics of his "educator". If the figure of Apollo embodies Nietzsche's justification of the multiple in retreat from the vertiginous pull of the One,¹⁶ this does not happen in the name of a different conception of individuation; rather, Nietzsche simply invokes the necessity of appearance for life.¹⁷ Nietzsche's solution, since it continues to view space and time as having their origin in the subject of representation, ends up reducing itself to a value-judgment: it simply inverts the hierarchical relation between Truth and Appearance, while failing to question the basic notion of their differentiation.

Still in the third of the *Untimely Meditations*, the continued influence of the concept of individuality as in Schopenhauer's metaphysics means that individuality is seen as contrary to the empirical existence which Nietzsche aimed to justify through it. In contrast to his position from 1885 on, the "fundamental law" which defines the individuality of each individual and founds that individual's identity in time is not yet conceived as a serial law which already involves within itself all the stages of the individual's life-history and to which temporality is therefore immanent. Like Schopenhauer, in his 1874 text Nietzsche conceives individuality as the atemporal rule which manifests itself in a reiterated and circumstantial fashion within the series of events which

sequence they give you a law, the fundamental law of your proper self. *Schopenhauer as Educator (Schopenhauer als Erzieher)*, KSA I, p. 340.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, KSA I, p. 338.

¹⁶ It is significant that it should be through the figure of Apollo that Nietzsche demarcates himself from Schopenhauer. Dionysus returned only in 1885, with the theory of the Will to Power, in which the universal Whole is no longer opposed to the *principium individuationis*, but is its expression.

¹⁷ 'Here, at this moment of supreme danger for the will, art approaches as a saving sorceress with the power to heal. Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live.' *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, KSA I, p. 57. (Speirs translation, p.40)

make up the existence of each individual; since it is unconditioned in its immutability, it is essentially distinct from that existence. The evolution and mutability of each life-history are not contained within the law: they are merely consequences of the diversity of the external conditions that form the empirical framework of its manifestation. Thus, for Nietzsche, the individual can regain contact with his own individuality only by withdrawing his existence from its empirical determinations, transforming each moment of his life-history into an exact expression of his meta-empirical individuality. 'That heroism of truth — writes Nietzsche — consists in its one day ceasing to be its plaything. In the process of becoming all is hollow, deceitful, vain and worthy of our contempt; the puzzle which man ought to solve, he can only release from being, in being such and not other, in the everlasting. Now he begins to check how deeply he is united with becoming, how deeply he is united with being — an enormous task wells up before his soul: to destroy all becoming, to illuminate all falsity in things'.¹⁸ In this identification with the undying individuality which constitutes the core of that which he is and guarantees his identity in becoming, that is, his status as *being*, the individual is reduced to a pure, petrified essence, a disembodied spirit; and, at the same time, the spatio-temporal horizon which is the theatre of his life-history, condemned as it is as being "*vain and deceitful*", remains bereft of immanent consistency — in the face, not any more of the One, but of the individual and atemporal law of which it is viewed as a mere sensory manifestation.

The works of this first period do not achieve a positive position on either the individual or individuality: Nietzsche endeavours, in these writings, simply to invert the ethical consequences of Schopenhauer's paradox of an intelligible individuality to which no empirical individuation corresponds, but without questioning the underlying metaphysical postulates. The individual which Nietzsche aims to justify remains split between an extrinsic definition (as a particular within a spatio-temporal multiplicity in which all differentiation as such is considered unreal) and an intrinsic definition (as an atemporal individuality which reduces him to an abstract entity) — in other words, split between one differentiation which is purely numerical and another which is real but abstract.

¹⁸ *Schopenhauer as Educator*, KSA I, p. 374/5.

1.3. The individual without qualities

The publication of *Human, All Too Human* in 1878 marked an open break with Schopenhauer's metaphysics, and, in Nietzsche's own view, by the same token with metaphysics in general. This break meant, above all, ceasing to accept the distinction between a "world of metaphysics" and a "world of representation". 'It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it is hardly to be disputed', Nietzsche wrote at this time, 'For one could assert nothing at all of the metaphysical world except that it was a being-other, an inaccessible, incomprehensible being-other; it would be a thing with negative qualities.'¹⁹ We are, then, now dealing with something more than a simple hierarchy — with a true *autonomy* of the world of representation vis-à-vis the world of metaphysics. Nietzsche even solemnly declares: 'we are in the realm of representation (*Vorstellung*), no 'intuition' can take us any further'.²⁰

This autonomy conferred on the forms of space, time and causality brings in its wake the reality of the *principium individuationis*, affirmed against the illusion of the undifferentiated One. Space-time becomes an objective principle of individuation. The individual is no longer seen as a mere phenomenon: 'There are only individuals'.²¹

The concept of the individual occupies a key position in Nietzsche's works of this period. Nietzsche attempts to determine the historical conditions which permitted the appearance of sovereign individuals who fight for their own individuality, in accordance with the model which he discovers in Italy's "Renaissance Man".²² However, this autonomy of representation compromises the basis of the individuality of each singular being. In fact, to reject the possibility of an unconditioned world constituting the principle of intelligibility of the empirical world means to deprive individuality of the status of an immutable law underlying both the identity of each individual in time and the very internal principle of individual differentiation. On the strict level of representation, the individuality of human action is necessarily diluted by the empirical constraints of a given life-history. Nietzsche goes so far as to argue that

¹⁹ *Human, All Too Human (Menschliches, Allzumenschliches)* I, 9, KSA II, p. 29. English translation: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. by R.J.Hollingdale (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p.15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 10, KSA II, I. 30. (Hollingdale translation, p.16)

²¹ KSA IX, 6 (158).

²² One of Nietzsche's main sources of inspiration here was Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), especially its second part on the development of the individual in terms of self-sufficient individuality.

the biographical sequence of each individual's life is determined across the long chain of empirical causality in such a fashion that, as he puts it, 'if one were all-knowing, one would be able to calculate every individual action, likewise every advance in knowledge, every error, every piece of wickedness. The actor himself, to be sure, is fixed in the illusion of free will; if for one moment the wheel of the world were to stand still, and there were an all-knowing, calculating intelligence there to make use of this pause, it could narrate the future of every creature to the remotest ages and describe every track along which this wheel had yet to roll'.²³

On the level of representation, any internal law of action disappears. The individual can no longer live according to his own law, can no longer be himself. The only law that remains is that which governs the multiplicity of individual life-histories: the principle of causality which mechanically determines all events within the "wheel of the world" on the basis of their position in the order of simultaneity and succession.

It follows that individuality also ceases to be reachable by means of the closure of each individual on himself. On the strict level of the forms of space and time only external relations exist; in this sense, the "interior" of each particular being is simply the prolongation of those relations, and, in Nietzsche's words, 'We have transferred "society" into ourselves, diminished it, and withdrawing into oneself is no escape from society; rather it is often a meticulous *clearing-up* and *interpretation* of our [inner] processes according to the schema of earlier experiences'.²⁴

If representation is maintained to be the sole plane of reality, then numerical difference is henceforth given objective status. The only individual difference now admitted is the numerical, given the refusal of any internal, individual principle of differentiation. The individual is thus condemned to the status of a mere generality, no more than the internal reproduction of the empirical framework within which his existence unfolds.

What, then, is the basis of individuality which enables each singular being to construct himself as a person, as an autarkic individual? Nietzsche's solution is aporetic: since individuality is not a primary datum to be found by each individual within himself, it has to be reconceived as a task to be accomplished. Numerical difference then has to be turned into real difference, through a process by which each individual frees himself of his general features. Nietzsche even declares:

²³ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* I, 106, KSA II, p. 103 (Hollingdale translation, p.58)

²⁴ KSA IX, 6 (80).

'My moral would be ever more to deprive men of their universal character, and to specialize in it, up to a degree incomprehensible for the others to achieve'.²⁵ He now sees individuality as a model to be constructed and realised by each individual: 'The point is, however: that *each* designs his own model-image and actualizes it — the individual model'.²⁶ Nonetheless, this conception of individuality is clearly incompatible with Nietzsche's reduction operation on the entire structure of reality, on the level of representation and its laws. The dynamism implicit in the movement from each being towards his individual model enters into contradiction with the reduction of all causal processes to a single one (that which comes into play in the strict, mechanical enchainment of all events within the "wheel of the world"). This would entail admitting that the real cause of human action could be a tendency towards an individual *telos* whose existence is merely ideal. Nietzsche himself seems to be aware of this contradiction when he asks: 'How does the model relate itself to our evolution? To that which we must necessarily strive for? Is the model at best an anticipation? But why then necessary?'²⁷

In the end, Nietzsche denies any power of causation to the individual model in which he had seen an alternative to the "intelligible character" paradigm. This model is, as he says, no more than "*a representation of the ego*" (*Vorstellung vom 'Ich'*).²⁸

The concept of an individual model to be constructed and realised, which had replaced the notion of a fundamental law to be discovered and lived, proves to be no less illusory than its predecessor. Individuality cannot be conceived as something internal to each individual, as the formal cause of the individual's identity in time, because that would entail the existence of a real conditioning relationship between the intelligible plane of the law and the empirical plane of action. The correlative of this position is that, equally, individuality cannot be conceived as something merely external, as something to be attained which, in projective terms and as final cause, can underwrite individual identity. The individual model, as final cause, effectively acquires the same significance on the plane of representation as did the atemporal law conceived as its intelligible formal cause.

²⁵ KSA IX, 6 (158)

²⁶ KSA IX, 6 (293)

²⁷ KSA IX, 7 (62); WP 331.

²⁸ KSA IX, 7 (62); WP 331.

Given that Nietzsche quite specifically wishes to remain on the level of representation, rejecting any recourse to "metaphysical intuitions", which, he believes, are characterised by, precisely, the postulation of ideal entities in order to explain empirical phenomena (such as laws, forms and purposes), the examination of the real foundation of individuality cannot make any headway at this stage.

Schopenhauer, with a view to saving individuality, had reduced the individual to the status of an appearance, by the notion that individuation exists exclusively in the forms of representation. Nietzsche, inverting Schopenhauer's position and guided by the project of justifying individuality within empirical individuation itself, saves the forms of representation by converting them into the sole real plane. However, he thus reduces individuality to an appearance, a mere representation made of itself by an "*ego*" petrified within the causal chain of events in time. Nietzsche is still the prey of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, even in the form in which he rejects it.

Nietzsche's first attempt to resolve this aporia — this tension between individuality without individuation and individuation without individuality — takes the form of the idea of the Eternal Recurrence.

1.4. Individuality as identity in repetition: the doctrine of the *Eternal Recurrence*

The image of a long chain of causation or "wheel of the world", within which all events are closely interlinked, led Nietzsche, in 1881, to evolve the idea of the Eternal Recurrence. He now concludes that the total series of the world's events cannot have had a beginning in time, nor is it acceptable that it should tend towards any final state; as such, the series must be eternal, in other words it must always have existed and will always continue to exist.²⁹ Since Nietzsche starts out from the principle that, as the totality of the force of the universe is constant, the number of possible events within the chain of causation is finite, he concludes that becoming is circular: 'Up until this moment an infinity has already expired; that is, all possible developments must already have existed. Thus the development of this moment must be a repetition, and also that which generated it, and that which arises from it, and so forward and backward again!'³⁰

²⁹ 'all is eternal, unbecome [*ungeworden*]', KSA IX, 11 (157).

³⁰ KSA IX, 11 (202).

The idea of the eternal recurrence of all events now makes it possible to conceive the basis of the individuality of each individual in a form which is innovative and, at the same time, the locus of a terrible paradox.

We have seen how, when he reduces the real to the plane of representation, Nietzsche does not contest Schopenhauer's principle of individuation; he simply considers it as objective, that is, as a real determination of the objects of experience. However, we have also seen how that principle allows only numerical difference, not real difference. Since 1878, Nietzsche had conceived the individual objectively as a particular being numerically distinct from other particular beings, but not in terms of individuality. What constitutes the individual as such is merely the circumstance of not being able to have two different beginnings in time and not being able to occupy two different positions in space at once. On the basis of this continued view of the individual exclusively in terms of his place in the order of succession and simultaneity, Nietzsche concludes that temporal differences are necessarily translated into individual differences: just as a single individual cannot be present simultaneously in two different places, he cannot, by the same token, exist at two different moments. From one instant to the next, he is another. In Nietzsche's words, 'there is no Individual, in the shortest instant it is something other than in the next, and its conditions of existence are those of innumerable individuals'.³¹ The impact which the idea of the Eternal Recurrence brings to bear on the basis of individuality is to confer individuality on each individual through the simple prolongation to eternity of the spatio-temporal definition of individuation. If time is considered as not only real but infinite, then the individual appears in time endowed with new determinations — he is henceforth defined as the infinite repetition of himself.³² If the identity of the individual is dissolved in time through the unending succession of moments, if he is obliged to become other in every moment, then it is through time that the individual becomes himself at each moment: 'Man! Your entire life will become like an hourglass, always again turned over and always running out'.³³

Individuality thus appears, no longer as an identity in the continuous order of the linear succession of time, but as an identity in the discontinuous order of repetitions in eternity. If the life-history of each

³¹ KSA IX, 11 (156).

³² 'All becoming moves itself in the repetition of a determinate number of absolutely identical states', KSA IX, 11 (245).

³³ KSA IX, 11 (148).

individual is the exact repetition of another series of instants already realised an infinite number of times in the infinite number of circles of the Eternal Recurrence, then each individual, being different from what he was in the preceding moment and from what he will be in the following moment, is, nonetheless, absolutely identical to himself in every moment, as the infinite repetition of himself. Each event in his individual life-history is endowed with an individuality arising from an eternal and unique model which actualises itself in him in absolute fashion. Thus, his individuality in each moment, in other words, that which makes each individual exactly the individual he is at that given moment, is the eternal individuality which he incarnates at that moment as a repetition: the individuality of his life-history as a whole is the multiplicity of individualities embodied in the multiplicity of "individuals" which, in their succession, go to make up that same individual's life-history.

The access of each individual to his individuality no longer happens through the mediation of a subtraction from his empirical conditions as a means of becoming a transparent expression of an atemporal law; nor does it occur through the pursuit of an individual model constituting a sublime form. Individuality is no longer conceived as residing either on the hither side of each individual's empirical existence, or beyond it: it is in it, and merges with it in an absolute fashion in each moment. To accede to one's individuality — offered as it is in each moment to each individual as an original given, conferred on him eternally in an immanent fashion — is to reply in the affirmative to the question: 'Dost thou want this once more, and also for innumerable times?'.³⁴ Individuality takes on the nature of an original given; and at the same time, it appears as a task. It is what we are and do in each moment, because in each moment we exactly repeat our existence, which is itself an eternal given, conferred on us once and for all. But our individuality also has to be conquered. It is not enough to be: one has to want to be what one is. To take oneself as the individual model to be realised is to make that model coincide with what one is: 'To live in such a way that we wish to live once more, and wish to live in eternity! Our task challenges us in every instant'.³⁵

The idea of the Eternal Recurrence provides a further basis for the individuality of each individual. This basis may, in Leibnizian terms, be called *radical*. The past may be infinite, but the number of individuals

³⁴ *The Gay Science (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft)* 341, KSA III, p. 570.

³⁵ KSA IX, 11 (161).

who are brought into being over time is not. It follows that the genesis of an individual, however distant it may be, is never lost in the depths of time: it can only be prolonged up to the individual himself. Each individual is both the end-point of the long chain of causes which originated in him and the new starting-point of the genesis of his own repetition — that is, the genesis of the infinite number of other individuals whom he repeats and announces, and who are distinguished from him only on the temporal plane, as different occurrences in time of one and the same individuality. This radical individuality is based on the fact that, within a single conjunctural situation, that is, within a complete cycle of actualisation of all possible individuals, it is impossible for two indistinguishable individuals to appear. Given the intimate interrelation of all causes, that would mean that both had had the same genesis — in which case they would not be two, but one and the same individual (either spatially and temporally identical, as a single occurrence of one individuality, or else distinct only in the temporal sense, as different occurrences, in different cycles of recurrence, of a single individuality): ‘Whether indeed [...] something identical has existed is entirely indemonstrable. [...] Whether there can be something identical in one total state — two leaves, e.g.? I doubt it: it would presuppose that there were an absolutely identical generation, and for that we would have to assume that throughout all eternity something identical had endured, despite all alterations to the total state and the creation of new properties — an impossible assumption!’³⁶ The idea of the Eternal Recurrence furnishes a radical basis for the principle of the identity of the indistinguishable: since his genesis has its roots in eternity and in himself, the individual becomes absolutely unique, and is endowed with a uniqueness which confirms itself in the eternal repetition of himself and of the entire chain of events that culminated in him.

Within the idea of the Eternal Recurrence, individuality is still absolutely conditioned by its place in the order of temporal succession; this does not mean, however, that it is annulled. On the contrary, it acquires new temporal determinations — within each cycle, as a radically individualised and unique genesis; and within eternity, as the infinite repetition of itself in each moment of its existence.

The notion of the Eternal Recurrence finds Nietzsche extracting the most radical consequences possible from his “anti-metaphysical” decision to remain on the plane of representation, refusing the categories of “reason”, “beginning” or “finality”. Returning eternally on themselves,

³⁶ KSA IX, 11 (202).

spatio-temporal relations have become self-subsistent, conferring on themselves, in circular fashion, sufficient reason for the fact that they are what they are rather than something else. In this universe, then, each individual partakes of the privilege of being able to display his *raison d'être* in the fact of existing in a particular space and at a particular time. Nonetheless, the idea of the Eternal Recurrence still requires a complement: it needs to be doubled by an internal perspective on the individuality of each individual. It was precisely such a perspective that Nietzsche attained from 1885 on, with the elaboration of the theory of the Will to Power.³⁷

II. The individual and individuality in the theory of the *Will to Power*

II.1. The return to metaphysics

The main innovation represented by the theory of the Will to Power is Nietzsche's abandonment of the plane of representation as sole means of access to the real. It follows that his principal target is now the mechanistic view of the world — because of, precisely, the rejection of meta-empirical categories of any kind: “Of all the interpretations of the world attempted hitherto, the mechanistic one seems today to stand victorious in the foreground. It evidently has a good conscience on its side; and no science believes it can achieve progress and success except with the aid of mechanistic procedures. Everyone knows these procedures: one leaves “reason” and “purpose” out of account as far as possible, one shows that, given sufficient time, anything can evolve out of anything else, and one does not conceal a malicious chuckle when “apparent intention” on the fate of a plant or an egg yolk is once again traced to pressure and stress (...) one has lost the belief in being able to

³⁷ We here adopt the thesis of Giorgio Colli, as expounded in *Scritti su Nietzsche* (Milano: Adelphi, 1980), in his chapter on Nietzsche's posthumous fragments (autumn 1884 to autumn 1885) (pp.151-160), to the effect that it is only in this period that the theory of the Will to Power makes its appearance in his work — because it is only at this time that he deliberately adopts the perspective of metaphysics as a means of endowing the world with the force of an explicative viewpoint, and also because it is only from this moment that he begins to elaborate the fundamental philosophical project to which he gives the name of, precisely, the *Will to Power* (*Der Wille zur Macht*).

explain at all.”³⁸

For Nietzsche, the function of mechanics, given its rejection of the categories of “reason” and “end”, is confined to *describing* the visible and formalising its relations exclusively through the categories of “shock” and “pressure”. What is now required is an *explicative* perspective, which can only be attained by questioning the internal processes of all phenomena. Nietzsche thus writes: “The victorious concept “force”, by means of which physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as “will to power,” i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc. (...) one is obliged to understand all motion, all “appearances”, all “laws”, only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ man as an analogy to this end”³⁹ He radically inverts his perspective on the interpretation of the real, abandoning the decision to reject any “intuition” beyond the plane of representation. It is now precisely the internal, that which escapes all representation, which has to become the explicative principle of observable external relations. All movements, all phenomena or laws will now have to be seen as a manifestation, as a “symptom” of processes of which they are merely an expression.⁴⁰

Nietzsche turns to metaphysics in order to endow the plane of representation with an explicative perspective. What “intuition” can he now invoke to discover force in its internal dimension? As in Schopenhauer, it is the analogy with man which constitutes the “secret passage” to the metaphysical world, the bridge to the “intelligible character” of all phenomena. This analogy will be even more explicitly invoked in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when Nietzsche states: “Suppose nothing else were “given” as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other “reality” besides the reality of our drives — for thinking is merely a relations of these drives to each other; is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this “given” would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or “material”) world? [...] then one would have gained the right to

³⁸ KSA XI, 36 (34); WP 618.

³⁹ KSA XI, 36 (31); WP 619.

⁴⁰ ‘To the power which transforms itself and always remains the same, belongs an *inside*, a character type of Proteus-Dionysos, disassembling and enjoying itself in the transformation’. KSA XI, 35 (68).

determine all efficient force univocally as — will to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its “intelligible character” — it would be “will to power” and nothing else.”⁴¹

II.2. The discovery of the essence of the World within the individual

In this return to metaphysics, the definition of the individual plays a twofold part. It is the analogical means of access to the world seen from within; and, since all movements and all phenomena are the result of relations between individual beings, to explain the world from within means to describe individuals, in their immanent dynamism.

Precisely because of the place it occupies, the concept of the individual is taken as the object of two different descriptive procedures: one leading from the individual as subject of knowledge to the world as named from within, and another aiming to explain the entire visible world by deriving it, as a symptom, from the internal processes discovered in relations between individuals.

To take man as an analogical principle is not merely a methodological decision: it is based on a *de facto* observation. Nietzsche believes that man is condemned to be the primal analogical referent for all interpretation of the world. The theory of the Will to Power is not to be distinguished from other interpretations of the world by its element of man-as- analogy. The mechanistic perspective itself is none other than a consequence of that analogy — for Nietzsche, the concept of the atom is a projection of the concept of subject/substance on to the smallest structure of the Immaterial extension. This means that analogy is no longer a neutral procedure. To take oneself as the first term of the analogy does not guarantee immediate access to the internal processes which govern all phenomena. To start out from man is always to start out from a particular interpretation.

The need thus arises for a prior critique of the systems of interpretation of man and their *distinguishing marks*; only after this can one strive to attain, through man, the internal perspective on the world.

Nietzsche here argues that the fundamental error which underlies all interpretations of man, and which man therefore incorrectly projects on to the real, is the error of the “individual”: ‘The Individual [is] the more

⁴¹ *Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Bose)* 36, KSA V, p 54.

subtle error'.⁴² Does this mean that Nietzsche denies the existence of particular beings, of beings which are numerically distinct and self-subsistent at a given moment in time? That is not the case: what he denies is a specific concept of the "individual" used by man to conceive of himself and, therefore, the world: 'In truth there are no individual truths, but rather mere individual errors — the Individual itself is an error. Everything that happens in us is in itself something other, that we do not know: we put intention and background and morality into nature in the first place. — I distinguish, however, the imagined individuals and the true systems of life, of which each of us is one'.⁴³ It is in the name of a new concept of the individual, as "*system-of-life*" ("Leben-systeme"), that Nietzsche now comes to see the notion of the "individual" as the most subtle of errors. Thus, to comprehend the non-imaginary nature of every individual (as "*system-of-life*"), which constitutes the analogical means of access to the world's internal processes, presupposes a critique of the notion of the 'individual' (as an imaginary concept) which man employs to interpret himself, only to falsify himself and, through himself, the world.

II.3 Imaginary individuals and real individuals

What Nietzsche essentially denounces in this imaginary notion of the "individual" is the presupposition of unity. To this he opposes the idea of the individual as a plurality, as 'a plurality of animated beings which, partly struggling with one another, partly integrating and subordinating one another, in the affirmation of their individuality, also involuntarily affirm the whole'.⁴⁴ In turn, the status of an indivisible unity is denied by Nietzsche to each one of the animate beings that make up the plurality which is each individual. He writes: "the very smallest "individuals" cannot be understood in the sense of a metaphysical individuality" and atom",⁴⁵; and again: "there are no durable ultimate units, no atoms, no monads: here, too, "beings" are only introduced by us".⁴⁶ To accept the existence of such single ultimate units would, Nietzsche argues, amount to transferring on to the infinitely small the unity and substantial identity

⁴² KSA IX, 11 (156).

⁴³ KSA IX, 11 (7).

⁴⁴ KSA XI, 27 (27).

⁴⁵ KSA XIII, 11 (111); WP 704.

⁴⁶ KSA XIII, 11 (73); WP 715.

which he refuses for the individual as composite whole.

But if ultimate units do not exist, where are we to find the roots of the "systems-of-life" which Nietzsche opposes to the imaginary notion of the "individual"? How can Nietzsche conceive the nature of a being in terms of multiplicity while denying the existence of single units? In the end, he will move on to the plane of individuation — the plane of the continuous and the homogeneous, the plane of Schopenhauer's One. Does this mean that Nietzsche will finally reject the existence of true individuation, if by a different route?

What is at stake here is not the absolute denial of particular beings, but, rather, a new form of conceiving the nature of the single out of which the composite is formed. The rejection of ultimate units is essentially polemical: Nietzsche's aim is to refute the concept of the atom, which he sees as the last redoubt of the categories of subject and substance, of that which might subsist in time beyond its actions. Thus, he writes: "whether as the fiction of a little clump of atom [*der Fiktion eines Klümpchen-Atoms*] or even as the abstraction of this, the dynamic atom, a thing that produces effects — i.e., we have not got away from the habit into which our senses and language seduce us. Subject, object, a doer added to the doing, the doing separated from that which it does."⁴⁷ To the notion of "atom" or "thing" he now opposes a new concept: that of the "*dynamic quanta*" (*dynamische Quanta*): "no things remain but dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their "effect" upon the same."⁴⁸ The essence of these ultimate units is action — an action in which it is impossible to distinguish the agent from the action's effects, since it invariably takes place inside a structure made up of a multiplicity of elements, themselves also active, which simultaneously occupy, in relation to each other, the positions of object and obstacle. To these "dynamic quanta" Nietzsche gives the name of the *Will to Power*: they are the primal element of the universe, its homogeneous dynamic, the sea of forces out of which individuation arises. Here it is that Nietzsche, having sloughed off all illusory notions of the individual, finds himself in contact with the essence of the world, face-to-face with its inner reality: "And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of

⁴⁷ KSA XIII, 14 (79); WP 634.

⁴⁸ KSA XIII, 14 (79); WP 635.

unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by “nothingness” as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally (...) do you want name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? (...) This world is the will to power — and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power — and nothing besides!”⁴⁹

II.4. Nomadic individualities

It is now necessary, after accompanying the process which led Nietzsche to the essence of the world — to the world as defined by its “intelligible character” — firstly, to endeavour to comprehend how he conceives the process of individuation within that sea of forces which he calls the *Will to Power*, and secondly, to analyse the new concept of individuality thus produced.

For Nietzsche, there exists, within the universe of force, an essential continuity between all its forms, which enables a process of continual metamorphosis of one into another. However, this continuum cannot be an undifferentiated whole. Nietzsche conceives it at all moments as exhibiting variations in intensity, with at least two orders of potency (when force accumulates at one point, it dissolves at another). These variations in potency presuppose the existence of points or singularities that constitute both poles of condensation and principles of differentiation; in Nietzsche’s words: “Mere variations of power [*Machtverschiedenheiten*] could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the value of

⁴⁹ KSA XI, 38 (12); WP 1067.

whatever else wants to grow.”⁵⁰ Any differences in potency within a dynamic continuum would cancel each other out, were it not for “a certain something” (*ein Etwas*), a singularity able to determine that very difference by interpreting it in relation to its own value, its own power of growth, in order to build on it. In the universe of the *Will to Power*, then, individuation comes as of right before differentiation.

What is this “something which wants to grow” (*ein wachsendes Etwas*), this minimum elements of the universe of force? In the fragment cited above, Nietzsche defines it in terms of two key determinations: the *will to growth*, and an *interpreting being*. This definition is bolstered by a spatial perspective: ‘when A acts upon B, then A is first localized, separated from B’.⁵¹ The minimum elements of force are always differently located and establish among themselves a system of co-locations which takes itself as its own referent.⁵² Nietzsche further conceives these locations as centres of the movement of the will: ‘I need initial points and centres of movement, from which the will propagates itself’.⁵³

Thus, the minimum elements which make up the totality of the movement of force and form the internal principle of its differentiation are conceived on the basis of four determinations, namely: a) they are differently located; b) they exist in a relation of tension with all the other elements; c) they struggle to achieve their own growth; and d) they interpret systems of difference in terms of their own value.

The main innovation in this conception of minimum singularities as primal elements in the sea of force is the affirmation, not so much of *individuation* as of *individuality*, as the principle of differentiation of force, and thence of the process of constitution of individuals as “systems-of-life”. If individuation precedes differentiation as of right, then individuation itself must be constituted by individuals endowed with individuality — with an internal quality which enables them to interpret variations in potency and construct them as oppositions. It is thanks to the existence in the universe of a multiplicity of individualised singularities, each with its own individuality, that it is possible to create

⁵⁰ KSA XII, 2 (148); WP 643.

⁵¹ KSA XIII, 14 (80).

⁵² Nietzsche accepts the existence of a multidimensional space, considered absolute not as a separate, self-existent substance but as the result of co-localisations of forces: “I believe in absolute space as the substratum of force: the latter limits and forms. Time eternal. But space and time do not exist in themselves.” KSA XI, 36 (25); WP 545.

⁵³ KSA XIII, 14 (98).

differences, establish relations of tension between dynamic quanta and constitute individuals as organic totalities.

II.5. Individuality and spontaneity

But how does Nietzsche now conceive the basis of the individuality of each of these singularities? The fragments of this period, in which Nietzsche endeavours to build a systematic vision of the concept of the will to power, are marked by an apparent failure to define the concept of individuality. Nietzsche seems to oscillate between an extrinsic definition (the individual as merely the expression of the system of relations which contains him) and an intrinsic definition (the individual as endowed with immanent qualities which manifest themselves in unconditioned fashion in the relations of conflict which he establishes with all other individuals). On the one hand, he declares: "The properties of a thing are effects on other "things": if one removes other "things", then a thing has no properties."⁵⁴ On the other, he affirms that every being is that which it is, constituted in an absolutely individualised form which manifests itself in all its peculiarity in every action vis-à-vis other individuals: "That something always happens thus and thus is here interpreted as if a creature always acted thus and thus as a result of obedience to a law or to a lawgiver, while it would be free to act otherwise were it not for the "law". But precisely this thus-and-not-otherwise might be inherent in the creature, which might behave thus and thus, not in response to a law, but because it is constituted thus and thus. All it would mean is: something cannot also be something else, cannot do now this and now something else, is neither free nor unfree but simply thus and thus."⁵⁵

This indeterminacy concerning the basis of each individual's individuality is the result of the strategic duality which Nietzsche employs to combat the mechanistic interpretation of causal processes. On the one hand, since he wishes to endow the plane of dynamic relations with an explicative perspective, taking those relations as "symptoms" of internal processes, he strives to find an immanent basis for the differentiation between dynamic singularities which can, as of right, precede the system of causal relations and can therefore function as a principle of intelligibility. On the other hand, against the atomism that underlies that same interpretation (which supposes the existence of

⁵⁴ KSA XII, 2 (85); WP 557.

⁵⁵ KSA XII, 2 (142); WP 632.

extensive elements that are indivisible and are endowed with internal properties which are not conditioned *vis-à-vis* their actions or relations), he stresses the essentially functional nature of each dynamic singularity and, therefore, tends to define it only extrinsically, as a mere pole of convergence of the relations it establishes with other singularities. The conflict is thus linked to the ontological status of the concept of *relation* within the theory of the Will to Power. Which should be primary as of right — the universe of internally individualised singularities, or the system of relations out of which its properties have been constituted? How can Nietzsche conceive an immanent basis for each individual's individuality without reducing it to an isolated substance that subsists in time beyond its properties or actions? And, conversely, how is it possible to affirm the functional nature of each individual without conferring an autonomous ontological status on *relation* as such?

While not systematic in its scope (this is, in any case, characteristic of Nietzsche's principal intuitions), the solution adopted to deal with the antinomy concerning the ontological status of *relation* entails: 1) defining all dynamic relations as essentially perspectivist; 2) affirming the superiority of the internal dynamism of each singularity vis-à-vis its external relations.

II. 6. The individual and its essential relations

For Nietzsche, *relation* is inherent to force; it derives from the fact that "a force can expend itself only on what resists it".⁵⁶ Tending as it does towards a constant increase in power, each force, rather than expanding indefinitely, is at all moments modulated within a conflict with that which it offers it resistance. A force, then, only exists within a *field of forces*. How does this tension between forces establish itself? Is their nature that of pressure, of the shock of contiguity? If so, how are we to comprehend their individuation, the fact that they do not dissolve into a homogeneous mass? Nietzsche argues that if one force is to act on another in a continuous fashion, then it is essential that they remain distinct in terms of location: 'when A acts upon B, then A is first localized, separated from B'.⁵⁷ It follows that forces must necessarily act at a distance — but if they are not contiguous, how can they capture the tensions between them and perceive reciprocal differences of power?

⁵⁶ KSA XIII, 11 (77); WP 694.

⁵⁷ KSA XIII, 14 (80).

The need to answer this question leads Nietzsche to adopt the thesis of the essentially perceptive nature of all beings. In his words, 'Do the various forces stand in relation, such that this relation is bound up with an optics of perception? That would be possible if all being were essentially something perceptual'.⁵⁸ Each force is related to all the other forces because it perceives them: it is a window on that totality. It is, then, at a distance — in other words, maintaining their co-localisations — that forces attain equilibrium among themselves: "distant forces balance one another. Here is the kernel of perspectivism".⁵⁹ A dynamic equilibrium among forces is formed out of the play of multiple perspectives, the constant inter-perception of all forces: 'The "effect at a distance" cannot be got rid of: something attracts something else, something feel itself attracted. This is the basic fact: in comparison, the mechanistic representation of pressure and impact is only a hypothesis on the grounds of appearance and the sense of touch. [...] In order that this will to power can manifest itself, it must perceive those [other] things'.⁶⁰

The perception attributed by Nietzsche to all forces or dynamic singularities is not pictorial in character: it is of a purely intensive nature. Each force perceives only differences of power among the multiplicity of forces in relation to which it exists. It is in this sense that Nietzsche claims that there exists a greater perceptive exactitude and clarity in the inorganic world, compared to the organic: 'The transition from the inorganic world into the organic is a transition from fixed perceptions of force-values and power relations into perceptions which are uncertain and indeterminate — because a plurality of beings struggling against one another (= Protoplasma) feels itself as opposed to the external world'.⁶¹

In the inorganic world, the balance between the forces within a system is stable, since the differences of power have been crystallised; each force therefore has an exact perception of these differences of value and their relations. By contrast, in the organic world, which differs from the inorganic in the sense that each individual is not a mere singularity but, in Nietzsche's words, 'a plurality of beings struggling against one another (= Protoplasma) feels itself as opposed to the external world', the relations which each individual establishes with others can never be stable. Differences of power are constantly coming into being, through the structuring or destructuring of internal relations of force; these

⁵⁸ KSA XII, 5 (12).

⁵⁹ KSA XI, 36 (20); WP 637.

⁶⁰ KSA XI, 34 (247).

⁶¹ KSA XI, 35 (59).

differences modify the relations of power, at the next level up, between the individual as plurality and the outside world. Each individual's perception is here already the result of the *co-possibility* of internal perceptions, and even his perception of his own value — on the basis of which he determines his differences of value *vis-à-vis* other individuals — is uncertain and inexact.

For Nietzsche, perception is in its essence not the internal representation of an external given (were that so, the organic world would be the kingdom of the greater clarity, since it possesses systems that permit prolongation and resonance from outside to inside); it is, rather, the regulated, dynamic relation between the totality of singularities in conflict and each one of those singularities. Perception exists because the multiplicity of the elements of a structure expresses itself in each single unit. The more regulated the relation — that is, the more stable the differences of power — the more clearly will each singularity perceive, or, rather, express within itself the multiplicity with which it enters into relation. Thus, if Nietzsche defines *relation* as the result of the perceptive nature of each force, it follows reciprocally that perception itself exists only in and through its relational nature: an isolated force free of all relations — in any case an impossible hypothesis, given its essentially functional nature — would be no better than "blind".

II.7. Perspectivism

The thesis of the perceptive nature of the relation between forces enables Nietzsche to argue the primacy as of right of dynamic singularities and their perceptions *vis-à-vis* the relations they establish through them. However, this does not mean that it is possible at this stage for each force's perception of the system of differences of power within which it exists to be considered as internally determining the principle of its individuality. Since perception can only happen within a dynamic structure, each force can, within itself, only express external differences of power. Its uniqueness derives entirely from its status as sole pole of convergence for the multiplicity of perceptions which make up the field of forces within which it operates. Its definition is still conceived in external terms: it would require knowledge of all of the perspectives which tend towards it. Nietzsche thus writes: "A thing would be defined once all creatures had asked "what is that?" and had answered their question. Supposing one single creature, with its own relationships and

perspectives for all things, were missing, then the thing would not yet be "defined".⁶²

We believe that Nietzsche's conception of the internal principle of individuality is not to be sought primarily in the notion of *perception* (*Wahrnehmung*), but, rather, in that of *perspective* (*Perspektiv*). This distinction between *perspective* and *perception* is not systematically maintained throughout Nietzsche's work. Nonetheless, it is the only means of grasping another criterion of qualitative differentiation of perceptions employed by Nietzsche, in addition to that already established between organic and inorganic worlds. In fact, to the hierarchy of power-levels of forces there corresponds, he believes, a hierarchy, conceived in terms of extensiveness and accuracy, of the perspectives brought to bear by each force on the totality with which it enters into relation. He writes, in 1886, in the Preface to the new edition of *Human, All Too Human*: "You shall above all see with your own eyes the problem of *order of rank*, and how power and right and spaciousness of perspective grow into the heights together".⁶³

From the viewpoint of the perception of external differences, a greater degree of internal structuring of each force — corresponding to the transition from the inorganic world to the organic — will result in a reduction in the clarity and exactitude of perception. However, Nietzsche counter-argues that an increase in power brings a greater extensiveness and accuracy to the "vision" of each force. Clarity and exactitude of perception vary with the degree of external stability of the differences of power, whereas extensiveness and accuracy of perspective depend on the degree of internal power of each force. The criterion of distinction between degrees of *perception* is, then, extrinsic to the force, while that of degrees of *perspective* is intrinsic to it. Thus, *perception* and *perspective* may be seen as, respectively, the outer and inner faces of the relation between forces. Through perception, each force expresses within itself the viewpoint of the totality of forces and their differences of power; through perspective, each force expresses its own internal degree of power vis-à-vis that same totality.

The interrelation of *force* and *perspective* allows Nietzsche to affirm that all quantitative changes are the translation of qualitative changes, and, therefore, to define the individuality of each singularity from an internal viewpoint. From the vantage point of perception, the degree of power of each force can neither increase nor diminish without its nature

⁶² KSA XII, 2 (149); WP 556.

⁶³ *Human, All Too Human*, KSA II, p. 20. (Hollingdale translation, p.9)

changing: "Might all quantities not be signs of qualities? A greater power implies a different consciousness, feeling, desiring, a different perspective; growth itself is a desire to be more".⁶⁴

Every quantity of power is the expression of a quality belonging to the perspective of a particular force on all other forces. The Will to Power thus takes on an *imminently intellectual* nature: the unceasing movement of each dynamic singularity up from a given state to a higher one may be viewed either in terms of the struggle for greater power or of the struggle for the extension of perspective, the combat for "*consciousness*".⁶⁵

The manifestation of power in terms of perspective allows each dynamic singularity to emerge endowed with internal qualitative determinations. Its uniqueness no longer depends exclusively on its place in a hierarchy of power or on its position in a system of perceptual relations. Perspective institutes a quality intrinsic to power: it enables all differences of quality or nature to communicate with differences of quality or degree. But how does this communication happen?

The increase in the power of each dynamic singularity, being quantitative, occurs not extensively but intensively — that is, the power of each force does not arise from the addition of a number of lesser units of power; rather, it is simply a matter of extent or degree. An increase in power, then, happens on a continuous scale. What ensures its numerically simple nature is that power's internal organisation in terms of a quality, of a perspective. To each degree of power there corresponds, not the addition of new perspectives but, rather, a new perspective as such. It follows that the continuous increase in the power of each singularity takes place within parameters characterised by a dense internal structuring, beyond which there occur discontinuities of power and qualitative discontinuities of perspective. Where a new perspective gives rise to the internal organisation of a new quantum of power, a real increase in degree results; where the opposite is the case, the continuous increase in power is overcome by an internal breakdown, and the outcome is an actual decrease in power. This creates what may be called an internal 'wrinkle' in the continuum of force that determines the appearance of two dense poles of a lesser degree, each of them organised

⁶⁴ KSA XII, 2 (157); WP 564.

⁶⁵ It is in this sense that Nietzsche considers thought as part of the essence of the will: 'feeling and more precisely various types of feelings must be recognized as ingredients of the will, and secondly also thought: in each act of will a thought commands — and one should not believe that this thought can separate itself from the volition, as if then [after the separation] volition would still be left over'. KSA XI, 38 (8).

in terms of its own perspective, which establish a mutual relation of pure opposition: out of one individual emerge two. In Nietzsche's words, "Generation" is only derivative: originally, where one will is not sufficient to organize that which has been completely appropriated, a counter-will steps into force, and initiates the separating-off, a new centre of organization, after a struggle with the original will.⁶⁶ These points of discontinuity in the augmentation or continual intensification of a force by a single perspective go to make up the points of communication between quantitative differences (differences of degree) and qualitative differences (differences of nature).

The higher degree of power of each individual corresponds, then, not to a maximum level of extensive incorporation of forces, but, rather, to a more harmonious internal structuring, a maximum level of intensification of a force driven by a higher perspective. It is this internal intensification of power which constitutes, for Nietzsche, the actual internal quality of each singularity, its intrinsic principle of differentiation which exists as of right prior to all dynamic relations. Nietzsche designates this from the viewpoint of the simple quantity of power expressed, as "value" (*Wert*) — "What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power."⁶⁷

II.8. Hierarchy as the principle of individualisation

Individuality may be an internal given of each singularity, prior as of right to its inherent system of dynamic relations or perspectives, but this does not mean it is a static given. Within each individual, by reason of the unceasing combat which he engages in with all other individuals, there occur continual quantitative alterations in power which are reflected in qualitative alterations in perspective. To whom, then, does the dynamic principle of these internal transformations belong? Are they merely the reflection of structural changes, or is the reverse the truth?

Nietzsche affirms that there exists a constant quantity of global energy in the universe, which is appropriated in vectorial fashion by the sum of singularities that constitute it and transform it into a multiplicity of forces existing in an ceaseless relation of tension. In this sense, "Supposing that the world had a certain quantum of force at its disposal, then it is obvious that every displacement of power at any point would affect the whole

⁶⁶ KSA XII, 5 (64).

⁶⁷ KSA XIII, 11 (83); WP 674.

system".⁶⁸ If the universe is a dynamic whole, must it be concluded that the increase or reduction in the power of each singularity is the result of global changes in the system as a whole? If so, its individuality would be transcendent to it, and its internal viewpoint would be merely the reflection of its external relations: at this point, Nietzsche would end up conferring ontological primacy on the circumstance of *relation*, to the detriment of the real multiplicity of the individuals that make up the universe.

It is here that Nietzsche's definition of the dynamic principle of force — as the struggle, not for self-preservation but for the continual increase of power — comes into its own. The basic principle of the theory of the Will to Power is grounded in a view of the individual's nature, not as something functional but as something absolutely spontaneous. Any transformation of power occurring within an individual is the result of his internal activity; the global shifts in power within the force field or system in which that individual operates are an expression, or "symptom", of that activity, and not the reverse. As Nietzsche puts it, "the force within is infinitely superior; much that looks like external influence is merely its adaptation from within."⁶⁹

It is only the principle of the essential spontaneity of each individual-as-Will-to-Power that can provide Nietzsche with a grounding for his thesis of the primacy as of right of individuation vis-à-vis the differential relations of power. Furthermore, only this principle supplies a grounding for the thesis of the intrinsic nature of the individuality of each individual.

The external definition of individuality, as the unique expression of the multiplicity of differential relations of power, thus becomes solely a "symptom" of the internal definition, the degree of power and the quality of perspective. Equally, all movements or events occurring on the plane of representation are "symptoms" of processes of conflict between individuals who are absolutely individualised. The very opposition between the interior and exterior of each individual no longer exists: each individual is pure interiority. If his internal force is infinitely superior to his external influences — given that the latter are now reduced to an

⁶⁸ KSA XII, 2 (143); WP 638.

⁶⁹ KSA XII, 2 (175); WP 70. Nietzsche's critique of Darwinism relates, precisely, to that system's inversion of perspectives in its explanation of external/internal relations in the genesis of living forms: "The influence of "external circumstances" is overestimated to the point of nonsense by Darwin; what is essential about the life-process is just the gigantic creative power which produces forms working from within while using and exploiting "external circumstances" ". KSA XII, 7 (25).

expression of the internal force of other individuals — then what exists at each moment is a *co-possibility* as between a multiplicity of forces, all absolutely spontaneous and individualised, existing within a finite and constant quantity of global energy.⁷⁰

II.9. Individuality and eternity

This model of an instantaneous *co-possibility* among the totality of individual actions in conflict confers on individuality the nature of a given and, at the same time, a task. From the internal viewpoint, individuality is the law of the series which already contains the totality of the actions of each individual, grounded in his essential spontaneity. From the external viewpoint, by contrast, if each action results from the relation of *co-possibility* among individuals who are in conflict in each moment, it has to be conquered through the instantaneous mediation of all other individualities. *Co-possibility* operates as if it were a natural selection among virtual entities: it actually creates the individuality of each individual. The sphere of individuality is thus not annulled by *co-possibility*; rather, it is this circumstance that allows its authentic realisation. Nietzsche accordingly declares: “Every basic character trait that is encountered at the bottom of every event, that finds expression in every event, would have to lead every individual who experienced it as his own basic character trait to welcome every moment of universal existence with a sense of triumph”.⁷¹ Each instant of universal existence, each event conceived as a *co-possibility*, thus becomes the expression of each of the individuals in conflict — the disparate convergence of a multiplicity of virtual entities. Simultaneously, the fundamental character of each individual, that is, his true individuality, becomes the expression of the character of each event, an actualisation of his virtual individuality.⁷²

⁷⁰ The model of *co-possibility* among individuals allows Nietzsche to abolish his own notion of “cause”: “Cause” and “effect” [...] That means: the separation of the event into action and passion’. KSA XII, 7(1). All individuals are absolutely active: “action” and “passion” are simply modes of designating two types of action: ‘What is “passive”? To resist and react. To be hampered in forward-grasping movement: thus an act of resistance and reaction. What is “active”? Striding towards power’. KSA XII, 5 (64).

⁷¹ KSA XII, 5 (71).

⁷² It is also the model of *co-possibility* that enables Nietzsche to conceive the link between the spontaneous nature of each individual and the rule-governed character of

If the infinite totality of instants of the Eternal Recurrence is the result of a finite totality of individuals which, at every moment, in the interaction of perspectives and the *co-possibility* of actions, affirms and realises their individuality, it follows that to say *Yes* to one’s own individual existence, to endorse it in its absolute difference and uniqueness, is, according to Nietzsche, also to say *Yes* to the entire universe and to eternity: “If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things; and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event – and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed.”⁷³

The notion of the primacy as of right of individuation and individuality, *vis-à-vis* the universe of difference and relation, permits Nietzsche, at this moment, to conceive of an immanent basis for the Dionysiac *Yes* to the whole of existence. However, within the theory of the Will to Power that *Yes* to the Whole no longer compromises individuation as such. That intuition — as first formulated in *The Birth of Tragedy* — of a purely affirmative existence, of a *Yes* to the world and to all things, can now be conceived within a metaphysic of the individual. The Dionysiac experience no longer has to mean the dissolution of each initiate in the delirious experience of the mystical One. Indeed, the contrary now prevails: if each individual’s individuality is grounded in the deepest essence of the world — in eternity itself, in that eternity whose existence was required to bring into being every event of one’s own existence — then to say *Yes* to that eternity, to say *Yes* to the entire universe, is to say *Yes* to oneself and to one’s own character as a unique event. The moment when we endorse our own individuality, while at the same time our soul vibrates in joy “like a harp string”, is also the moment when, as Nietzsche writes in this last remarkable fragment, “all

each and every one of the events which make up his life-history: “Let us here dismiss the two popular concepts “necessity” and “law”: the former introduces a false constraint into the world, the latter a false freedom. “Things” do not behave regularly, according to a *rule* (...) There is no obedience here: for that something is as it is, as strong or as weak, is not the consequence of an obedience to a rule or a compulsion – The degree of resistance and the degree of superior power – this is the question in every event: if, for our day-to-day calculations, we know how to express this in formulas and “laws”, so much the better for us! (...) There is no law: every power draws its ultimate consequence at every moment. Calculability exists precisely because things are unable to be other than they are.” KSA XIII, 14 (79); WP 634.

⁷³ XII, 7 (38); WP 1032.

eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed.”

Translated by Christopher Rollason

WHAT IS MATERIALISM?

III.

P R A C T I C E S

It is not difficult to derive the following hypothesis from Marx's aphorisms: just as traditional materialism in reality conceals an idealist foundation (representation, contemplation), so modern idealism in reality conceals a materialist orientation in the function it attributes to the acting subject, at least if one accepts that there is a latent conflict between the idea of representation (interpretation, contemplation) and that of activity (labour, practice, transformation, change). And what he proposes is quite simply to explode the contradiction, to dissociate representation and subjectivity and allow the category of practical activity to emerge in its own right.

Étienne Balibar,
The Philosophy of Marx