

*“What we are at liberty to do.”  
On Giving Style to One’s Character  
in Nietzsche’s Daybreak (§560)<sup>1</sup>*

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I.

In aphorism 560 of *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes the following:

*What we are at liberty to do.*—One can dispose of one’s drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis; one can do it with the good or bad taste of a gardener and, as it were, in the French or English or Dutch or Chinese fashion; one can also let nature rule and only attend to a little embellishment and tidying-up here and there; one can, finally, without paying any attention to them at all, let the plants grow up and fight their fight out among themselves—indeed, one can take delight, though it gives one some trouble, too. All this we are at liberty to do: but how many know we are at liberty to do it? Do the majority not *believe in themselves* as in complete *fully-developed facts*? Have the great philosophers not put their seal on this prejudice with the doctrine of the unchangeability of character? (D 560)<sup>2</sup>

On the surface, at least, the meaning of the aphorism is clear. Our character is composed of ‘drives’ or ‘impulses’ [*Triebe*], such as anger, pity, curiosity and vanity. Like gardeners, we can ‘cultivate’ these drives in

different ways—which means that we are not free (or at liberty) to decide, unreservedly, what elements make up our character, yet we are free, to an extent, to change the way those elements are correlated and organized, as well as to nurture some of them while suppressing others. In this sense, we are free to change our character. Except that few people know this. In fact, most people think that their character is fixed—they “*believe in themselves as in complete fully-developed facts.*” The Schopenhauerian doctrine of the immutability of character, Nietzsche adds, is a rationalization of this (false) prejudice.

However, an in-depth analysis of the aphorism demands that we find answers to a few rather complex questions. First, such an analysis entails examining what Nietzsche means by “character” and what is the significance of his rejection of the Schopenhauerian doctrine of the immutability of character. Second, since the aphorism addresses what “we are at liberty to do,” we need to ask ourselves in what sense it addresses our *freedom*. Indeed, Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the immutability of character is inseparable from his determinism and, therefore, from his rejection of free will. Since, as is well known, Nietzsche also rejects the notion of free will (cf., for example, M 124, GM I. 13, JGB 19-21, GD Irrthümer 3-8, AC 14), it is clear that the concept of freedom at stake in the aphorism of *Daybreak* cannot be that of freedom as free will—which raises a third question: whether, in rejecting the immutability of character, Nietzsche also rejects determinism—at least a determinism in Schopenhauer’s mold—or if, on the contrary, he has a conception of freedom that is compatible with determinism, or with some form of determinism, at least. This question, in turn, is inseparable from another—the question of what consciousness is, and what role it plays in our lives. The rejection of free will implies that our actions are not the result of free choices by the so-called ‘I’ of consciousness—and that, therefore, consciousness is not, as we tend to think, the ‘agent’ of our actions. If this is so, the problem that arises is whether this implies that consciousness is wholly ineffectual in terms of action (whether it is “epiphenomenal” in the strongest sense of the term), or whether, even if it is not an “agent,” it plays some role in defining what we are and do.

Character, freedom, and consciousness: only an analysis of these concepts can adequately clarify the meaning of aphorism 560 of *Daybreak*. This means that we need to understand these concepts to be able to understand another one—the Nietzschean concept of “self-creation.” The “liberty” or “freedom” that is at stake in a person being the “gardener of one’s character” is the freedom to “create oneself.” In aphorism 290 of *The Gay Science*, where the image of character as a “garden” (and also as a “palace”) emerges once again, Nietzsche praises the art of “[giving] style to one’s character” (GS 290), or of fitting all the strengths and weaknesses of character “into an artistic plan” (GS 290), or of impressing on all facets of character “a single taste” (GS 290), or of giving oneself one’s “own law” (FW 290). Now, this praise is evidently an exhortation to the reader, and it is this same exhortation that is at issue in aphorism 335, where the art of giving oneself one’s own law is identified with the action of “creat[ing] for yourself an ideal of your very own” (GS 335), or of “creating ourselves” (GS 335). This creation of ourselves, in turn, is presented in *Twilight of the Idols* as the prerogative of those few who, like Goethe, are strong enough to be *free* (TI Skirmishes 49).

In short, the question that I shall attempt to discuss in this essay is, then, that of knowing what is the role of character and what is the role of consciousness in the exercise of freedom as self-creation—or, to borrow the terms of aphorism 301 of *The Gay Science*, what is the nature of the *vis creativa* that makes it possible to become the “poet” of one’s own life (GS 301), and what is the freedom of this “creative force”? Yet another way of formulating this question is to ask, in the terms of aphorism 335 of *The Gay Science*, as well as in those of *Ecce Homo*, what is at stake in “becoming who we are”—on the assumption that this requires “freedom” in a sense which, being something other than free will, is problematic and can only be determined through an inquiry into what “character” and “consciousness” mean.

Let us begin, then, with the concept of character.

## II.

For Schopenhauer, “character” is the “essence,” or the “inner nature,” or the “internal mechanism” of which all actions and effects of an object are an expression. Any reality that exists and can be known in space, time, and in accordance with causality has its character, the human body being, of course, no exception to this rule. The human character is precisely the “essence” of the human body—the force that moves it internally. If one abstracts from all the empirical manifestations of this internal mechanism that moves the human body and thinks of this mechanism “in itself” (*an sich*), then we are thinking of it as “intelligible character”; if, on the other hand, we think of it inasmuch as it is *expressed in the actions* of a human body—i.e., if we think of it as the “characteristic which is common to the whole series of actions” of a given human organism<sup>3</sup>—then we are thinking of it qua “empirical character.”<sup>4</sup>

However, what is truly distinctive of the human character and makes it different from the character of animals or plants is what Schopenhauer calls its “ethical content.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike animals or plants, every human being has an individual character (rather than simply a “species character”), and this is so because the character of every human being includes “a unique combination of the three basic incentives [of human action], namely selfishness (*Egoismus*), compassion (*Mitleid*) and malice (*Bosheit*).”<sup>6</sup> In a note from the second volume of the *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer adds a fourth incentive (*Triebfeder*): the will to inflict pain on oneself, which is, in essence, a drive for self-renunciation, or, if you will, a kind of masochistic drive toward the annihilation of oneself as an individual.<sup>7</sup> Yet, regardless of the problem of knowing how many of these “basic incentives” there are, Schopenhauer’s idea is that in each individual, each of these incentives coexists with the others in different degrees. Thus, the relation of some incentives to others, the predominance of some over others, makes up a specific moral formula, or a rule of action, or a law which, as Schopenhauer repeatedly says, is unique to each of us and which, moreover, corresponds to a single “act of will.”<sup>8</sup> This “act of will” *is* character—which also means, in different terms, that every

character is an individuated will, or an individuation of the will. It is in this sense that human character is individual, innate, and unchangeable,<sup>9</sup> and it is also in this sense—that is, qua individuated will—that character is the “core” [*Kern*] of our existence as individuals and precedes consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

This notion of an “intelligible character” that might be distinguishable from its empirical manifestations, and therefore immutable, is the kind of metaphysical abstraction that, as is well known, Nietzsche deems entirely fictional and even contradictory since it implies the conception of an “in itself.” If there is such a thing as an “internal mechanism” of the body, it is natural, rather than “metaphysical” (in the sense of “supra-sensible”). More concretely, this means that the “incentives,” which according to Schopenhauer make up the “intelligible character” are for Nietzsche merely the *drives*, *affects*, and *instincts* that make up the organism. Thus, for example, in aphorism 6 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche makes it clear that if one wants to know who a given person is (i.e., what is their character), the answer lies “in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand with respect to each other” (BGE 6). Our character is, therefore, as Nietzsche phrases it in a posthumous note, a specific “association of drives.”<sup>11</sup> Any facts about our character are facts about our “innermost” drives, and these drives are invariably presented by Nietzsche as being “physiological” or “organic”—i.e., as being what makes up our body, our condition as natural beings. The “internal mechanism” of the body is, in short, only a given association of the body’s internal drives, or to put it another way, it is only a given relation and internal organization of these drives, which means that Nietzsche *naturalizes* the Schopenhauerian doctrine of incentives and character.

Insofar as drives are something *of* the body, they are living things, they are “life,” and everything that is living *evaluates* or places certain *values*—since to live, Nietzsche says, means “to evaluate, to prefer, to be unjust, to be limited, to want to be different” (BGE 9). Every drive projects a given value, and this projection is its aspiration “to present *itself* as the ultimate

purpose of existence and as rightful *master* of all the other drives” (BGE 6). What this means is that each drive is a “will to power,” that the body is made of a multiplicity of “wills to power,” and that, therefore, the association and coordination of drives is a result of relations—of conflict, struggle, subjection, domination, command and obedience—between them.<sup>12</sup> This is why our *character* is a given “order of rank” (*Rangordnung*), or *hierarchy* of drives and why this hierarchy is, at the same time, a hierarchy of *values*—that is to say, a “moral,” “ethical,” hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> This is what is implied at the end of aphorism 19 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche says that “willing” must be understood “within the framework of morality” (JGB 19), since morality is the “doctrine of the power relations under which the phenomenon of ‘life’ arises” (BGE 19). The relations between drives are “relations of domination,” i.e., relations of power and, therefore, of command and obedience, and they are “moral” relations because they are relations between values.

However, to fully grasp this notion one must establish another element of differentiation between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, one that is vitally important. For Nietzsche, every drive is a perspective and the evaluations that drives develop are *perspectival evaluations*.<sup>14</sup> Drives are physiological events, but they are also elementary processes of perception and, thereby, perspectives. This means, first, that each of them is a *relation* to the world as something external to the organism. This relation is perceptual, but it is not necessarily conscious. As Leibniz demonstrated—thereby earning Nietzsche’s praise—perception does not imply a conscious state; its relation to consciousness is merely “accidental.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, the “innermost,” or most fundamental, drives of our organism to act, for the most part, in an entirely unconscious way. On this issue, the difference between Nietzsche’s view and Schopenhauer’s is that for the former, drives are, in fact, perceptions, and being perceptions they are not “blind”: they are, rather, “selective, intelligent, attentive” (cf. KSA 11. 577, 37 [4]), i.e., they have by their very nature a relation with the external world, and this relation co-determines and constantly alters the sense or content they acquire.

But there is more to it than that. A given hierarchical association of drives and values implies for Nietzsche a *dynamic relation* between these drives and values. Insofar as a drive is a perspective, what it perceives (albeit without consciousness) is not only the value it places, nor is it only the world it relates to. It also perceives its *relation to the other drives*,<sup>16</sup> that is, it perceives its *power* in relation to the power of the other drives. This is why the relation between the drives is a conflict, and each drive is a will to power, in other words, the "logic" of its activity is that of the intensification of its "power" (*Macht*) in relation to the other drives. The very identity of a drive is, therefore, *relational* and is always in the process of being transformed by its conflictual relation to the other drives—or, as Nietzsche is fond of saying, by its "interpretative" relation to the other drives. Insofar as the identity of a drive is relational or interpretative, it is also *dynamic*, and this dynamism means that a drive is not an entity, but a process—namely, the process of *positing* its own value in the context of a multiplicity of power relations.<sup>17</sup>

One should also underline that this multiplicity—the multiplicity of drives that make up an organism—is not a closed totality. On the contrary. Insofar as drives are perceptions, they are, as mentioned above, relations with the external world, and these relations are likewise dynamic. One should also add, however, that Nietzsche seeks to explore the hypothesis that the very totality of the real is a multiplicity of "wills of power"—a multiplicity, that is, not of entities, but of processes, a virtually infinite crossroads of force fields intrinsically related to one another and in constant mutation as a result of their mutual connection, and a crossroads which is "chaos" because it has no overriding purpose (even if each living unit of life is innerly purposive, "organic"). The organism is not, therefore, a totality unequivocally *separated* from the so-called external world, but rather a mere part of the totality of the real, a self-organized multiplicity of processes that are *continuous* with the infinity of processes that makes up the totality of the real. The boundaries between the organism and the external world are not simply fluctuating and fluid: they are, in essence, merely apparent. That we feel the existence of these boundaries and,

therefore, the “resistance” of the external world, is merely the result of the fact that the organism’s drives coordinate among themselves *as if* they were a single force field—and, therefore, as if they sought the satisfaction of a given need or common interest.

This coordination, however, is no more than that: a coordination. As Nietzsche says in a posthumous fragment, “all unity is unity *only as organization and coordination*” (KSA 12. 104, 2 [87])—and this has two immediate and crucial implications: (1) the organism is *merely* the coordination, organization and hierarchization of drives and has no inner core or immutable nature (which was, precisely, what the notion of “character,” in the Schopenhauerian sense, named); (2) “things” also have to be thought of as crossroads of relations, and their “unity” is merely “organization and coordination”—the formation of force fields, or (in Nietzsche’s early vocabulary) “spheres of power.” A *percipient* and a *perceived* are not, therefore, comparable to two “atoms” that, while preserving their own identity, impact each other. Instead, they are merely two force fields in one and the same *continuum*—and their “nature,” their “character,” is nothing other than the crossroads of their relations, the provisional result of a multiplicity of processes internal to that *continuum*.

Now, this hypothesis—that reality is “becoming,” that there are only processes and that all existing processes are interconnected—implies a radical rejection of both the concept of “substance” and the concept of “essence.”<sup>18</sup>

Only if we bear this in mind can we fully understand how radical is Nietzsche’s rejection of the Schopenhauerian doctrine of the immutability of character. Schopenhauer defends the immutability of character because he believes he can maintain, first, that the relation between the basic incentives that correspond to the “ethical content” of the organism’s internal mechanism are an innate *essence*; second, because he believes he can maintain that this essence functions as the foundation or *substance* of the multiplicity of our actions. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, there are no substances, no essences—let alone innate ones—and so the thesis of the immutability of character is ultimately unintelligible and absurd. Or,

to put it in different terms, the rejection of the concepts of essence and substance implies the rejection of the very concept of the immutability of something that exists and is alive.

In short: where Schopenhauer sees the will or character as a "foundation," a "substance," or an "essence," Nietzsche sees only a given coordination, organization and hierarchization of the drives and affects that make up the body—the multiplicity of the "life of the drives" (*Triebleben*, BGE 36), the perceptual, inter-relational and dynamic hierarchization of the values projected by the drives.

This allows us to grasp the significance of Nietzsche's rejection of the Schopenhauerian distinction between "intelligible character" and "empirical character." Nietzsche does not simply naturalize intelligible character—rather, he rejects the concept altogether. To merely naturalize it would imply continuing to hold as apt the distinction between a "foundation" of our actions and its "expression" in and through these actions—or between a substance, or a substratum of our actions, and these actions themselves: a distinction, that is, between the essence of what we are and the instantiation of this essence in a multiplicity of actions that express it but are distinct from it. The Nietzschean rejection of such a distinction is stark, and all readers of Nietzsche will be aware of this from reading chapter 13 of the "First Essay" of the *Genealogy of Morals*, where the existence of a "substratum" of our actions is denied: "[...] there is no such substratum," Nietzsche argues, "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (GM I. 13).<sup>19</sup>

All of this being so, Nietzsche's "naturalization" of Schopenhauer does not include the claim to establish the biological reality of drives as a fact, what is "objectively" there, the "really real" beyond appearances. There are no "objects" if there are no essences and substances. Instead, there are only spheres of power that *become* "objects" *for* given perspectives, but these are not "subjects," as they, too, are not "substances," but rather "becomings," a "flux" without real borders within the "flux" which is reality as a whole.

And yet the non-essential and non-substantial nature of *character*—the fact that all the components of character are already “action” or “doing,” i.e., activity, process, dynamic relation, fluctuating coordination, “flux”—in no way undermines the *relative stability* of character. Human character is not immutable, but it does tend to be stable; it is constantly shifting, but its mutations are usually microscopic and virtually imperceptible. Just as, in the case of the evolution of species, the long-term continuation of a set of conditions detrimental to the growth or complexification of the features of a given lineage generates the illusion that the species is more than an abstraction, or even that there is an eternal species,<sup>20</sup> so, in the case of character, the experience of a lifetime tends not to be sufficient for significant changes in character to take place.

This is the idea expressed by the first aphorism where Nietzsche criticizes the doctrine of the immutability of character, in *Human, All Too Human* (HH I 41): “during the brief lifetime of a man,” Nietzsche writes, “the effective motives are unable to scratch deeply enough to erase the imprinted script of many millennia.” However, were a life to last eighty thousand years, characters would succeed one after the other, and we would even witness the successive appearance of “an abundance of different individuals” (HH I 41). Character thus tends to be stable over the course of a lifetime—and, for that very reason, it also tends to appear immutable. It is also in this sense that, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche speaks of a “brick wall of spiritual *fatum*” and an “immutable that is me” (BGE 231). The *fatum* here does not refer to an innate character or a truly immutable biological nature (which would have to be conceived as an “essence”), but merely to the circumstance that the latitude of changes in the life of the drives that is possible in a lifetime is limited. It is only this latitude that is “immutable.”

To conclude this analysis of the concept of character, all that remains is for us to make a terminological note that will be proven important later. The “movement of the drives” [*Triebbewegung*], or “life of the drives” [*Triebleben*] is also called by Nietzsche the *instinctive* life—the plane of “instinct” and of the “alliance between instincts.” In many instances, the term

"instinct" (*Instinkt*) means exactly the same as "drive" [*Trieb*]. Yet, when Nietzsche speaks of instincts as "automatisms" (e.g., AC 57, KSA 13. 398, 14 [226]), or as mechanisms of action that presuppose a degree of regularity and rely on memory (e.g. KSA 9. 505, 11 [164]), this suggests that instincts are more permanent forms of activity than drives, i.e., that instincts are formed *on the basis* of drives and are a *consolidation* of certain relations between drives. Instincts in this sense are among all the hierarchical relations between drives that exist in a given organism, the most *stable* ones, and those which most fundamentally determine *what* (or *who*) that organism is. Therefore, as we shall see, the phrase "my instinct" in *Ecce Homo* will come to mean exactly the same as "my character" (cf. EH smart 9).<sup>21</sup>

### III.

Given this conception of character, it is clear that, in aphorism 560 of *Daybreak*, Nietzsche means that, to a certain extent and in a certain sense, we are *free* to coordinate and organize in different ways the multiplicity of drives and affections that make up our body. But let us now consider what concept of freedom is at stake here.

First, one should underline that in various places Nietzsche seems to hold a strictly deterministic stance—as deterministic as Schopenhauer's. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for example, he states that "a person is necessary, a person is a piece of fate" (TI Errors 8), and that "the fatality" of our existence "cannot be extricated from the fatality of everything that was and will be" (TI Errors 8). In *Daybreak*, he suggests that to believe that our actions result from our will is as ridiculous as stepping outside one's house at sunrise and saying "I *will* that the sun shall rise," believing that the sun rising was an effect of this so-called "act of will" (D 124).

It would be hard to find a more clearly enunciated deterministic or fatalistic position. And yet Nietzsche states that he rejects free will just as much as he rejects "un-free will," or "captive will" (*der unfreie Wille*, BGE 21), and in the passages mentioned above, as well as elsewhere, he also never fails to insist on the idea of freedom—on *his own* concept of freedom (TI Skirmishes 38).<sup>22</sup>

This can only mean that Nietzsche understands that necessity and freedom are somehow compatible. However, what this compatibility means is difficult to establish. As we have seen, Nietzsche, in rejecting the idea of free will, holds that there is no *agent* of our actions (GM I 13), and hence there is no “I” (or no “I think,” no neutral subject) separable from the multiplicity of drives and affects that make up the totality of the organism. In other words, there really *are* no “subjects” (but only perspectival “becomings”). The “I” of consciousness is only a “synthetic concept” produced by the activity of the drives and affections, i.e., a mere concept aimed at giving unity to the successive multiplicity of conscious states that result from the intensification of certain relations between unconscious drives (cf. BGE 19, BGE 36, GS 333, D 115). How, then, is one to determine *who* is free to be a “gardener” of their character—to *whom* belongs the freedom to create themselves?

Freedom in the Nietzschean sense of the term can only belong to the “body,” i.e., to the organism as a whole—to the very multiplicity of drives and affects that constitute it. However, this multiplicity, as an organized, coordinated, and hierarchical multiplicity, *is* character. Nietzsche’s idea, then, is that character is free to restructure *itself*—and that the “gardener” of character is character itself.

The problem, however, is that it is difficult not to take the theory of action that results from this view of the body—the theory according to which the actions of the organism are, at any given time, the result of the power relations between all the drives that constitute it—to be a “deterministic” theory. This result is, at any given time, a *necessary* one: the organism’s self-regulation is, at any given time, *determined* by the relations between the drives. If, as we have seen, the multiplicity of internal processes that produce this self-regulation is intrinsically connected with the multiplicity of processes that constitute the external world, one can understand Nietzsche’s claiming that “the fatality” of our existence “cannot be extricated from the fatality of everything that was and will be” (TI Errors 8).

The idea that we would have the freedom to compose our character is, therefore, deeply paradoxical. What could that mean?

Implied in what we have uncovered so far on the concept of character is an idea that allows us, at least, to distinguish between Nietzsche's determinism and Schopenhauer's—an idea that is decisive for understanding the Nietzschean concept of freedom. And this idea is none other than that of *contingency*.

Given that, contrary to what Schopenhauer argues, one's character, according to Nietzsche, is neither a substance nor an essence and, therefore, does not act according to an innate and immutable "rule" or "law," one may conclude that while it is true that all our actions are determined or necessary, they are also on the other hand radically *contingent*. As Nietzsche says in aphorism 22 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, everything that happens in the world "follows a 'necessary' and 'calculable' course," but "*not* because laws are dominant in it, but rather because laws are totally *absent*" (BGE 22).<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, this notion of a lawlessness or a radical contingency adds an important qualification to Nietzsche's determinism—and distinguishes it from Schopenhauerian determinism. What I am as a living organism is something that is *in the making at every instant*, not something defined *a priori* by a "law" governing the "internal mechanism" of my being. Even if it were true that from the moment of my birth my whole future is already determined, it is no less true that, in each instant of my life, it is still in the making. In no lived instant is there ever a preestablished law that the totality of my organism must inexorably obey. From this, another crucial argument ensues: even if, objectively, my future is always already destined, *subjectively*, i.e., within the framework of the perspective or point of view in which I find myself at any given moment, it is always still *open*—it is *in the process* of being created.

It is this fact, above all, that allows Nietzsche to reject the concept of free will and, at the same time, to preserve the idea of freedom—or, more exactly, to conceive of a new concept of freedom. For Nietzsche, an organism is "free" when it defines for itself the "style" of its character, when it gives itself the "law" that governs it—i.e., when the evaluations and values that rule it are spun or created by the organism itself. As suggested by the aphorism on

Goethe mentioned above (TI Skirmishes 49), to be free is to create oneself, and this self-creation is nothing other than the creation of one's own values and evaluations, the creation of an "individual law."<sup>24</sup> While it is true that every life is "a piece of fate" (TI Anti-nature 6, TI Errors 8), it is no less true that being dealt the fate of creating one's own values is very different from being dealt the fate of living under the rule of externally imposed values. In *Twilight of the Idols*, in one of the passages where Nietzsche asserts that "we are a piece of fate" (TI Errors 8), he underlines, precisely, the difference between, on the one hand, the life of those who live ruled by the values and conceptions that belong to the Platonic-Christian tradition and, on the other, the life of those who are able to achieve "the great liberation" (*die grosse Befreiung*, TI Errors 8)—the emancipation from values and concepts such as that of God's judgement, or guilt, or sin, or free will.

Insofar as this kind of liberation creates new values, it also brings about the creation of independence—not in the sense of an absolute independence, but of a higher degree of autonomy from the tradition into which one is born, from the "herd," or the ruling morality. Therefore, more than a "liberation," it is, more precisely, freedom. According to aphorism 98 of *The Gay Science*, freedom means just that—"independence of soul" (GS 98)—and it is also in this sense, surely, that in Chapter 2 of the "Second Essay" of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche speaks of freedom as synonymous with the supra-moral autonomy of a "sovereign individual" (cf. GM II 2). Freedom as self-creation is thus a process of creating independence, autonomy, sovereignty—or, put simply, individuality.<sup>25</sup>

*Ecce Homo* offers a description, precisely, of the process by which Nietzsche created his individuality—not because such an individuality was already impressed *a priori* in his character, but because his fate was to be an organism that would carry out a long process of creating new values and therefore of self-creation (cf. EH Smart 9). Using the terms of aphorism 11 of *The Anti-Christ*, one might say that fate ordained that Nietzsche should develop a virtue of his own, a duty of his own, a "categorical imperative" of his own (cf. AC 11). His values emerged from an inner necessity—from a choice, but an organic, instinctive and

therefore "deeply personal" one (cf. AC 11). This process of the creation of individuality—of becoming who you are—was his freedom.

Note how in this passage of *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche identifies the instinctive with the individual. It is not consciousness that is individual—for, insofar as consciousness depends on concepts and signs and plays itself out on the plane of communication, its activity belongs, in fact, to man's existence as a "social animal" and it "actually belongs not to man's existence as an individual" (GS 354). For Nietzsche, character is something prior to consciousness (as it is for Schopenhauer)—and it consists, as we have seen, of the "most intimate" hierarchical relations between the drives, of the most regular, automatic and profound activities of instinct. Thus, freedom as self-creation means, in fact, an intensification of the individuality of instinct. Nietzsche never thinks in dualistic terms, but rather in terms of continuity and development. Therefore, the creation of a "self" [*Selbst*] is not the creation of something that would not otherwise exist, but rather the creation of a higher degree of individuality—a maximization of what is already individual in instinct, an intensification capable of liberating it to a certain degree from non-individual, gregarious, domesticating evaluations that tend to rule over it.

In the following section, I address a chapter from *Ecce Homo* that exemplifies with exceptional clarity what is at stake here, and which clarifies what is the role of consciousness in the process of the creation of oneself. The clarification of this role will allow us to understand the paradox implied in the concept of the creation of oneself, or, which amounts to the same thing, in the thesis that the "gardener" of character is character itself.

#### IV.

Let us analyze, then, the chapter of *Ecce Homo* in which Nietzsche seeks to explain how one can carry out the task of becoming who, or what, you are (EH Smart 9). One should emphasize that in other passages this task is explicitly conflated with the task of creating oneself (e.g., TI Skirmishes 49, GS 335).

Nietzsche begins by praising selfishness, or the love of oneself [*die Selbstsucht*], as indispensable to the task of becoming what you are—and immediately adds that in cases where this task is “far from ordinary,” there is no greater danger than being conscious of it, “catching sight of yourself with this task” (EH Smart 9). To accomplish this task, he suggests, hinges on not knowing “what you are” (*was man ist*, EH Smart 9). To be mistaken in this identification, to throw oneself devotedly to other tasks without realizing that they are a deviation from the task itself is indispensable for the task to be carried out. The “essence of reason” (EH Smart 9) lies in being aware of the fact that knowing oneself is “a recipe for decline” (EH Smart 9). Reason, the rational activity of consciousness, is “forgetting yourself, misunderstanding yourself, belittling, narrowing yourself, making yourself mediocre” (EH Smart 9). Whoever tries to become oneself by using consciousness and reason and by previously establishing a goal, a purpose, a meaning for their life, thereby distance themselves from the life of the drives that subterraneously grounds conscious thoughts and generates the very need for a goal or meaning. This attitude represses the maturation of the unconscious drives and affects, prevents them from coordinating themselves so that they themselves generate a goal and define the content of the task. In Nietzsche’s case, his task was “revaluing values” (EH Smart 9)—and Nietzsche accomplished it not because he ever made the conscious decision to undertake it, but because he let the “lengthy, secret work and artistry of my instinct” act (EH Smart 9).<sup>26</sup> The progressive maturation of instinct led to the growth, in Nietzsche’s own organism, of “an incredible multiplicity that is nonetheless the converse of chaos” (EH Smart 9). Spontaneously, the contradictions and oppositions of his life of the drives ended up coordinating among themselves without merging into one another, as if they obeyed a previously established artistic plan<sup>27</sup>—and this was the “precondition” without which the accomplishment of the task would have been impossible.

Assuming that this paraphrase of the aphorism sums up the gist of its meaning, let us now hear Nietzsche’s own words and what they explicitly say about consciousness:

The whole surface of consciousness—consciousness is a surface—has to be kept free from all of the great imperatives. Be careful even of great words, great attitudes. They pose the threat that instinct will “understand itself” too early.——In the mean time, the organizing, governing “idea” keeps growing deep inside,—it starts commanding, it slowly leads back from out of the side roads and wrong turns, it gets the individual qualities and virtues ready, since at some point these will prove indispensable as means to the whole,—one by one, it develops all the servile faculties before giving any clue as to the domineering task, the “goal,” the “purpose,” the “meaning.” (EH Smart 9).

At first glance, the passage seems to point to the fact that consciousness plays no role *whatsoever* in determining the task of becoming what you are. Everything plays out in the depths of the life of the drives, everything hinges on giving instinct the time to “understand itself” and to define the meaning of the task. Given that these depths are unconscious, consciousness, by definition, cannot access them as such. It only comes to know the results of all that subterranean activity—or rather, its interpretation of those results. This means that when one acts, one never really knows why one does so. As Nietzsche puts it in *Daybreak* and *Gay Science*, “all actions are essentially unknown” (D 116), and “the law of its mechanism [i.e., the mechanism of action] is unprovable” (GS 335). According to the *Ecce Homo* passage, one might even have to say that, as far as the task of becoming oneself is concerned, all that consciousness does is, in fact, to hinder or curb the development of instinct.<sup>28</sup>

This notion is indeed pivotal. If conscious states hinder or curb the development of instinct, that can only mean that they produce some effect, that they have some efficacy, albeit one detrimental to the task of becoming who you are.<sup>29</sup> Conscious states influence unconscious states—“instinct,” or “character”—therefore, they have an influence on action, even if it is an indirect and limited one.

In fact, this also allows us to understand that, contrary to what a cursory reading of the text may suggest, consciousness's influence is decisive in defining the meaning or content of the task. In Nietzsche's case, his task—the task whose accomplishment, according to *Ecce Homo*, made him not only an exceptional and incomparable individual, but even a form of “fate,” a kind of “fatality” that befell humanity itself—this task was the “revaluation of all values” (cf. EH smart 9, EH Destiny 1). The content of this task is unthinkable without consciousness. Obviously, were it not for everything that Nietzsche read and thought (drawing on consciousness and reason), he would never have found this task. He would never even have written a book.

The text's governing idea is not, then, that consciousness plays no role in determining the task of becoming what you are. It is, rather, that the role it plays in determining that task is limited and indirect. It is always far from sufficient. A conscious decision is assuredly not enough for someone, for example, to undertake a task such as the “revaluation of all values.” The appropriate historical conditions must be in place, and the essential element lies in the life of the drives, in its “power” and, above all, in the subterranean course it follows.

Consciousness, for Nietzsche, is an “apparatus of simplification” (KSA 11. 434, 34 [46]) and an “apparatus of signs” (KSA 11. 464, 34 [131]): its activity is the creation of concepts that simplify experience and which, in fact, merely express through signs (i.e., succinctly and superficially) the unconscious activity of the life of the drives—which, as we have learned, is a multiplicity of dynamic power relations among drives, affects, and instincts.<sup>30</sup> Now, when I say that the influence of consciousness is “indirect,” I mean that its efficacy is a process of incorporation: states of consciousness are effective only when the concepts and signs they generate are assimilated by instincts, i.e., when they become unconscious and integrate a new “automatism” (cf. KSA 13. 328, 14 [144]). Conscious states are never the “direct cause” of our actions.<sup>31</sup>

Their influence is not only indirect, but also limited. This means that their *power* is limited: states of consciousness are “trivial matters of fifth-

rate importance when compared to the value of the instincts" (A 39), their role is merely "subsidiary" (KSA 13. 328, 14 [144]). They influence power relations among instincts, but the latter always tend to go back to their former balance and automatisms. Therefore, the incorporation of conscious contents is slow—it is neither immediate nor assured. It demands insistence, discipline, a prolonged exertion and often risky experimentation. Incorporation is in itself a task, as Nietzsche underlines (GS 11). In fact, incorporation is only possible insofar as the organism is made up of a multiplicity of instincts, or drives and affects, that fight among themselves—that is, incorporation means simply that certain contents of consciousness end up contributing (albeit with a "fifth-rate" contribution) to a shift in the balance of forces among the instincts. Yet instincts always prevail, and it is their transformation (not a direct order or command from consciousness) that leads us to act differently.

Moreover, given that every organism can feel, think, will, and act without "catching sight" of itself (cf. GS 354), and given that all conscious states are "signs" that only inadequately express the relation between the organism's life of the drives and the external world with which it is in permanent contact, the contents of consciousness are our errors, or our *lies*. "So far," Nietzsche says in aphorism 11 of *The Gay Science*, "we have incorporated only our errors and [...] all of our consciousness [*Bewußtheit*] refers to errors" (GS 11, see KSA 9. 494, 11 [141], KSA 9. 503, 11 [162]). The world of signs in which consciousness moves is a "world of fiction" (AC 15). Among its fictions are not only concepts such as God, soul, guilt, or sin, but also fundamental categories such as cause, substance, or equality (e.g., AC 15, BGE 4). Among them is also included—and plays a prominent role—"our opinion of oneself" (D 115), i.e., the (false) notion that the "I" of consciousness is the "core" of our being (e.g., GS 11, TI 'Reason' 5). To go along with this error, and on the basis of it, to believe the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves, to overvalue consciousness, to believe in the power of conscious decisions, to fail to wait for the slow development of instinct, to not give it the time it needs to generate, in consciousness, more adequate "signs," less deluded

ideas and purposes—this is what *Ecce Homo* submits as the damaging influence of consciousness. Nietzsche himself, according to *Ecce Homo*, is a unique case, a man who recognized all “lies as lies,” who realized that “lies have been called truth so far”—who knew his “destiny” and whose “destiny” it was to become the “dynamite” that would carry out the “revaluation of all values” (EH Destiny 1). It would be an error, once again, to think that consciousness had no influence on this process, just as it would be an error to think that this process was wholly rational and occurred exclusively on the plane of consciousness.

However, if this is the case—if it turns out that consciousness, according to Nietzsche, does have some efficacy, albeit limited and indirect—does this not imply the rejection of determinism? Does it not imply that consciousness does enjoy a degree of freedom, albeit a limited one?

If by freedom one means a form of discrete or absolute causality—such that a state of consciousness can be said to be free of determination by anything that precedes it—the answer can only be: “absolutely not.”<sup>32</sup> From the fact that consciousness has the kind of efficacy I have tried to describe, it does not follow that conscious states are not produced or determined by the complex causality of the life of the drives. If a conscious state produces an effect, namely on the drives and instinctive affects, that effect is but a link in a causal chain—which, in fact, is a continuum, rather than a succession of discrete, separate moments.<sup>33</sup> No state of consciousness is its own cause (BGE 17, 21), which means that no effect of consciousness can be disconnected from the processes that produce consciousness. The strict necessity of fate rules here: the necessity, as we have heard Nietzsche say, that makes us “a piece of fate” (TI Anti-nature 6, Errors 8). This is not altered by the fact that consciousness does have, all the same, some efficacy.<sup>34</sup>

We can conclude, then, that Nietzsche’s conception of freedom has nothing to do with the idea of free will as a deliberative faculty of consciousness. Freedom lies in the “revaluation of values,” i.e., in the kind of value creation that generates the possibility of becoming who we are,

of becoming ourselves—in other words, of genuinely becoming individuals. Freedom means, as we have said, autonomy in the creation of values—the creation of oneself as an individual (see GM II. 2, GS 335, TI Skirmishes 49).<sup>35</sup>

Schopenhauer himself had insisted on the idea that *velle non discitur*, “will cannot be learned.”<sup>36</sup> No one creates new values and no one becomes oneself by making the conscious decision to do so. This cannot be taught—or learned. Nor are circumstances and genetics enough. According to Nietzsche, what is truly decisive is what unfolds behind our backs, in the hidden depths of the life of our drives. In some cases, fate dictates that something like an artistic plan is generated in those depths, shaping and then enabling the task of becoming what you are. In some cases, one may conclude, fate generates freedom—in others, it does not.

## V.

We can now, finally, consider the *topos* of subjectivity. Should we link these concepts of freedom and individuality with the concept of subjectivity? Or, on the contrary, do they imply only “processes without a subject,” already marking the beginning of the so-called “death of the subject”? Surely, as we already know, the “gardener” who structures their character and thereby creates their individuality is not a subject in either the Cartesian or the Kantian sense of the term. We should nonetheless ask ourselves what relation is to be established between this concept of self-creation and the Schopenhauerian concept of subjectivity as *subjectivity of the body*.

As noted earlier, the “gardener” of character is character itself, and in the analysis of *Ecce Homo* we saw in concrete terms what the freedom of such a “gardener” means. It is nothing but the way in which the life of the drives, instinct, i.e., character, creates values (instead of adapting to already existing values) and thereby creates its own individuality. Consciousness plays a limited role in this process, and, more importantly, this role does not in the least justify an understanding of consciousness as the “agent” of this process. There are only states of consciousness, and

these states are moments in the life of the drives—they are continuous with the world, as well as with the unconscious processes where our fate is truly decided. What this means, in short, is that if we had to pinpoint the agent of the process of self-creation, we would have to say that it is the body itself, the organism as a whole.

Now, in Schopenhauerian terminology, the “body” at stake here is precisely the body as it reveals itself from the subjective perspective.<sup>37</sup> When Nietzsche assigns to the “body” the role that the entire philosophical tradition since Plato had assigned to the “soul”—or when, in the context of Modern Philosophy, he replaces the “I” of consciousness with the “organism”—he is thinking neither of the “body” nor of the “organism” from the objective perspective, i.e., as an “object” knowable in space and time and according to the laws of causality. The perspective in which the body reveals itself as a multiplicity of drives and affects is instead that of the first-personal, lived body.

This is why, in aphorism 12 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche stresses the importance of not discarding the concept of the “soul” (BGE 12). Instead, one should create “new versions and sophistications” of this concept so that one may come to think of the soul as a “society constructed out of drives and affects” (BGE 12). The soul is, in fact, the body. And yet this also means that the body is in its entirety “soul”: a “society constructed out of many souls” (BGE 19), a multiplicity of “under-souls” (BGE 19), a multiplicity of “animate beings” or “intelligences.”<sup>38</sup> The body is precisely that “society constructed out of many souls” that we can also call “soul,” since all of it “thinks, feels, wills”—all of it is an experience of itself and of the world, a perspective on itself and the world, an interpretation of itself and the world.

Therefore, to philosophize “along the guiding thread of the body” (KSA 11. 565, 36[35] etc.) is for Nietzsche as it was for Schopenhauer, to philosophize from the point of view of the body’s *subjectivity*.<sup>39</sup> The “objective perspective”—i.e., the scientific perspective on the body—merely complements the subjective perspective, and it can be revised or rethought in the light of the latter. The “starting point of the body and

physiology" (*Ausgangspunkt vom Leibe und der Physiologie*, KSA 11. 638, 40 [21]) is not a scientific starting point—it is, rather, a starting point of interpretation of the lived body.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, this starting point is very different from the Cartesian one. First, because it is not a point of departure conceived as a realm of "immediate certainties," but rather as an intrinsically complex plane that demands the interpretation of a multiplicity and precludes any "immediate certainties" (see BGE 16, BGE 19). Secondly, because it is not a question of starting from the "I" of consciousness, but rather, precisely, from the body. And yet, if the interpretation of the body is the interpretation of the *lived* body, what is at stake is an interpretation of our subjectivity.

The decisive question, then, is whether this means that for Nietzsche there is after all a subject—and whether this subject is the "body" instead of the "soul," or the "I." The answer, I believe, has to be yes *and* no. If the term "subject" implies the idea of a permanent entity whose identity is monadic or atomic—the idea of a "substratum" or a "substance" that knows and acts—then, clearly, the body is not a "subject." In this sense, there is no "subject," as Nietzsche repeatedly says.<sup>41</sup> And yet Nietzsche himself, in aphorism 12 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, claims that one must rethink the "soul" as "Subject-Multiplicity" or a "multiplicity of subjects" (*Subjekts-Vielheit*, BGE 12)—in other words, that rethinking the body from the subjective perspective, as a multiplicity of "under-souls" implies rethinking it as "Subject-Multiplicity."<sup>42</sup>

What does the word "subject" mean here?

In a well-known passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche distinguishes between *Ich* and *Selbst*, between the "I" and the "self," i.e., between what consciousness makes me believe I am and what I truly am. It is not a matter, here, of distinguishing between two entities, the "soul" and the "body," but rather of distinguishing between two planes of the body, its surface and its depth: the plane of consciousness and the plane of the life of the drives, the plane of the "small reason" and the plane of the "great reason" (Z I "On the Despisers of the Body"). Now, the Nietzschean "subject" is certainly the "Self" and not the "I"—and it is a

“Subject-Multiplicity” because the “Self” is not an entity that can be understood as the “core” of the body, but as merely the effect of the coordination and organization of the multiplicity of drives and affects that constitute it.

The term *subject* is justified, therefore, for two reasons. First, because it names the “Self” as a thinking, feeling, willing, and acting multiplicity, i.e., as a subjective form of life. Second, because it is an adequate term to name the fact that the body has a unity—not the unity of a substance or a substratum, to be sure, but a “unity of coordination” nonetheless.<sup>43</sup> The “Subject-Multiplicity” is not a foundation, it is not a substance, it is not an agent separable from its actions, it is not the “I” of consciousness, it is not the pure “I think” conjecturally presupposed in all our cognitive acts—but it is the non-substantial unity of the multiplicity of processes that make up the body: it is, as we have said, the effect of their coordination, organization, and hierarchization.

This also means that, while it is true that to choose the lived body (instead of consciousness) as a philosophical point of departure is to once again take up the path carved by Schopenhauer, the meaning that Nietzsche attributes to this point of departure aims at an overcoming of Schopenhauer’s thought. Just as he realizes that from the Cartesian “I think” one cannot draw the existence of a thinking substance, he also recognizes that from the Schopenhauerian “I will” one cannot draw the existence of a substantial will (see BGE 16). From the discovery of the body’s subjectivity there follows no “immediate certainties” (BGE 16)—from the discovery that the “given” is our “world of desires and passions” (BGE 36) there follows no certainty of the existence of a substance that could be identified as “will” (BGE 16). This “given” is precisely the complex and multiple plane that is the life of the drives, where every “will” is, at the same time, a thinking and a feeling (BGE 19). Its interpretation is the interpretation of a non-substantial plane whose dynamic and relational structure compels one to think beyond oneself. Insofar as drives and affects are perceptions, and the values they posit have an historical character, subjectivity (thus understood) is just part of world and of

history—so that it can only be adequately accessed through genealogical interpretation, not introspection.

And yet, Schopenhauer's notion that our "identity" as individual beings is the identity of the lived body—that the "Self" is the body and not the "I" of consciousness—is fundamental to Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, this identity is relational and dynamic; it is the identity of a multiplicity in becoming rather than the identity of an atom that would remain the same over time. As the identity of a "Subject-Multiplicity," it is merely the effect of the organization, coordination, and hierarchization of drives and affects, and the meaning of this effect is a fluctuating, constantly shifting and changing one. But it does take place—whenever the multiplicity of drives and affects configures itself as one, and only one, sphere of power, i.e., when the body is organized as a unity that stands in opposition to other spheres of power and thereby senses their resistance.

This process—which to use different terms consists of the coordination of a multiplicity of "wills to power" as a single "will to power"—is a process of subjectivation of the body. Given its fluctuating, dynamic, and non-substantial nature, it is clear that it is a process that accommodates different degrees, different levels of development or weakening. And in fact there are many passages in Nietzsche's work where, for example, processes of "depersonalization" [*Entpersönlichung*, e.g. BGE 207] are described—processes such as the reduction of oneself to the condition of an "objective man" (BGE 207), or to the condition of a mere "function of the herd" (GS 116) or even the transformation of oneself into an "automaton of duty" (AC 11). At the opposite pole, we have, for example, the phenomenon of *intoxication* [*Rausch*]. Intoxication is an intensification of the sense of self, i.e., an extreme intensification of the subjectivation of the body, such that one liberates oneself from one's habitual identification with the "I" of consciousness and instead is made to "feel cosmically" (KSA 11. 443, 7[11]).<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, when Nietzsche describes the freedom of "free spirits," the freedom of those who cultivate an *inner* "pathos of distance," "the demands for new expansions of distance within the soul itself" (BGE 257),

what he has in mind is a kind of overcoming of internal contradictions and the construction of an organic *unity* that, in his terminology, spiritualizes the body and thus deserves the name of “higher spirituality” (*hohe Geistigkeit*, e. g. BGE 61, 201, 213, 219, 252).<sup>45</sup> This is the kind of unity that the gardener of *Daybreak* gives to their character—the same kind of unity that, according to aphorism 335 of *The Gay Science*, brings along the possibility of becoming “who we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (GS 335). If becoming who we are or creating ourselves is a process of creating individuality in which our evaluations are transformed—and in which, therefore, our “willing, thinking, feeling” is transformed—then it is surely a process by which we become (more) subjective. It is a process that does not have a “subject” in the Cartesian, Kantian, or Schopenhauerian sense, but it is nonetheless a process of subjectivation.

## VI.

All this becomes perhaps clearer if we tackle once again the passage of *Daybreak* quoted in the beginning of this essay and, more specifically, if we confront the paradoxical nature of the statement that the “gardener” of character is character itself. How can we understand this paradox? Let us attend to the particular case in which we tell ourselves that we want to combat a given drive and let us also consider the relation between our states of consciousness, on the one hand, and the “life of the drives,” on the other:

[...] *that one desires to combat the vehemence of a drive at all, however, does not stand within our power; nor does the choice of one particular method; nor does the success or failure of this method. What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of another drive, which is a rival of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us: whether it be the drive to restfulness or the fear of disgrace and other evil consequences, or love. While “we” believe we are*

complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is a drive *which is complaining about another*; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the *vehemence* of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive, and that a struggle is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides. (D 109)

The intellect—i.e., our ability to have states of consciousness—is merely an instrument or tool of our drives. Consciousness—i.e., “sapient,” properly human consciousness—merely expresses, by means of concepts and words (or signs) or, in other words, abstractly, the perspectives and evaluations that are already implied in our drives (or that our drives already are).<sup>46</sup> And that is why it can function as a “tool”: the expression—in the abstract or by way of signs—of the perspective and evaluations of a drive strengthens this drive in its struggle with other drives. The same is true of affects, since each affect is always already a drive or a will engaged in a struggle with other affects and, therefore, just as it is not really we who complain about the violence of a drive, but another drive that complains about it, so:

the will to overcome an affect is, in the end, itself only the will of another, or several other, affects. (BGE 117)

The intellect is a “hand” that “directs” our action—but this means that it is neither a hand that drives the action, nor a hand capable of controlling it. Nietzsche makes these distinctions in aphorism 360 of *The Gay Science*. A “directing” force, or a force “that directs” is, to use Julius Robert Mayer’s term, a “catalytic” force or cause.<sup>47</sup> The feeble flame of a match, for example, is only the catalytic cause of the explosion of a powder keg: it determines the moment at which the explosion occurs and the manner in which it occurs, but what explodes is the force or energy “damned-up” in the powder stored in the keg—therefore, the driving force, or the force that “drives” the explosion [*die treibende Kraft*] is the force accumulated in the powder, not the flame of the match. The same logic applies to the finger that presses the trigger of a gun, or the flapping of a bird’s wings that

causes an avalanche. Or, to take another example that Nietzsche also borrows from Mayer's work, the helmsman of a steamboat uses the rudder to direct the boat—and is therefore the “directing force” of this movement, the force that determines the “way,” the “direction” and the “goal” of this movement—but he is not its “driving force,” he does not set the boat in motion, nor does he keep it in motion (as this requires a physical force, coal). Therefore, he directs but does not control the movement of the boat. Similarly, our consciousness sides with certain drives against others and defines, in the abstract, certain ends or goals or purposes for our action—but it is never more than its “catalytic cause.” At most, our conscious purposes direct our action, give it a direction, but they do not drive it and, above all, do not control it. They are never more than a “surface” of our drives and affects and, therefore, they are never more than a tool of these drives and affects—a tool of their “will” to “explode” or “discharge”:

Therefore, it is not *because of happiness* or *because of utility* or to avoid pain that man acts: instead, a *certain amount of force* is expended, clinging to something on which it can discharge itself. What is called a “goal,” an “end” is, in fact, a *means* to this involuntary process of explosion. (KSA 10. 268-269, 7[77]; italics in original)

Our “goals” or “ends” are in fact “means,” mere “catalytic causes” of our actions. Therefore, our freedom is always relative and limited, for it is not at all the work of a “helmsman” who would control our actions. There is no such “helmsman” (GS 360), a “subject” who would be a “neutral substratum” (GM I 13), capable of extricating itself from the drives and affects and of deciding, absolutely, what to do—no such “subject” exists. Our freedom consists indeed in the exercise of our capacity for “self-creation,” for being the “gardeners” of our character, for using the (albeit limited) *power* of our thoughts to arrange our affections in a new way (see KSA 9. 526-527, 11[220]). Yet, since there is no “we” or “I” that is ever really independent of its affects and drives, all “methods” available to us to, for example, combat a drive, operate as “catalytic causes”: for example, to decrease the number of opportunities for the gratification of the drive,

to observe a rule so that its satisfaction will occur only within strict time-boundaries, to gratify it to the point of disgust, to associate its satisfaction with an unpleasant or painful thought, to seek other stimuli that may distract from it, to weaken the whole organism so as to weaken the drive (D 109). The force of all these “methods” is merely catalytic: none of them translates into a real control of the drives and affects. Similarly, the “gardener” who “cultivates” the shoots of some affects over others, who does this with “good or bad taste,” who does it “in the French, or English, or Dutch or Chinese fashion,” who lets “nature rule and only attend[s] to a little embellishment and tidying-up” or the one who, instead, lets “the plants grow up and fight their fight out among themselves” (D 560)—“his” thoughts are merely “catalytic causes” of the transformation of character, or “tools” of character itself.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The following is a reworking of an article published in Portuguese as J. Constâncio, ““*O que somos livres para fazer?*” Reflexão sobre o problema da subjectividade em Nietzsche,” in *Sujeito, decadence e arte. Nietzsche e a modernidade*, ed. J. Constâncio, S. Marton, M.J.M. Branco (org.), (Lisboa e Rio de Janeiro: tinta-da-china, 2014), 159-96. A translation from Portuguese to English of a first draft of the present version of the article was funded by Portuguese national funds through FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia under the project UIDB/00183/2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also: A 382 (“[...] Woe to the thinker that is not only the gardener, but only the soil of the plants that grow in him”), HH I 41 (“That the character is unalterable is not in the strict sense true;” etc.). The image of the garden to name character also appears in GC 290.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Der Handschriftlicher Nachlaß*, A. Hübscher, (Hrsg.) (Frankfurt am Main: Waldemar Kramer, 1966), Vol. I, par. 389, also quoted by John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer, The Human Character* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 39.

<sup>4</sup> See, above all, WWV I §26-§28, §55; WWV II §27, §29, §41-§44, §47-48; PFW, 46-62. [Schopenhauer's texts are referenced according to the canonical Hübscher edition: Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, Ed. A. Hübscher (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1949), 7 Vols. The following abbreviations are used: WWV: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*; PFW: *Preisschrift über die Freiheit des Willens*; PGM: *Preisschrift über die Grundlage der Moral*. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>5</sup> WWV I §55, 356. It should be underlined that this does not mean that the human character only has this "ethical content" (*ethischer Gehalt*). As already said, it is the character of the whole body. Moreover, Schopenhauer holds that our "capacities" (e.g., stupidity or intelligence) are also innate and part of the totality of character.

<sup>6</sup> John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer, The Human Character* (Philadelphia, Tempel University Press, 1990), 38; cf. PGM §16, 206-8, WWV I §55, 339-340; cf. PFW, 53-54 on the idea that vice and virtue are innate, and PFW, 56 for the claim that "through man's innate character, the goals which he immutably aspires to are already, on the whole, determined."

<sup>7</sup> Cf. WWV II §48, 697, n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., WWV I §55, 337-338.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., PFW, 46-62, WWV I §55. It may be useful to underline that, for Schopenhauer, only the human character is individual: other animals only have their species' character (the famous "Genius of the Species," so often quoted by Nietzsche).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. WWV I §17-19, §54 (327, n. 1), §55, 344-346; cf. PFW, 54: the "innate character" is "the authentic core of man as a whole" [*der eigentliche Kern des ganzen Menschen*]; cf. WWV II, §19; cf. WWV II §22, 314-315: "This knowing and conscious ego is related to the will, which is the basis of its phenomenal appearance, as the image in the focus of the concave mirror is to that mirror itself; and, like that image, it has only a conditioned, in fact, properly speaking, a merely apparent reality. Far from being the absolutely first thing (as Fichte taught, for example), it

is at bottom tertiary, since it presupposes the organism, and the organism presupposes the will" (*The World as Will and Representation, Vol. II*, trans. E.F.J. Payne [New York, Dover, 1966], 279). Cf. WWV II §19, §22, where Schopenhauer holds, in clearer terms than in any other passage, that consciousness is merely "a function of the brain" and a "parasite of the rest of the organism" (224ff.; see *The World as Will and Representation, vol. II*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, Dover, 1966), 201, and that the organism is the "visibility" or "objectivation" of will, the way it appears in space and time, and conditioned by causality.

<sup>11</sup> KSA 10. 274, 7[94]: "*das allgemeinste Bild unseres Wesens ist eine Vergesellschaftung von Trieben.*"

<sup>12</sup> That, for Nietzsche, there are only wills to power (or only a "multiplicity of 'wills to power'"), rather than *the* "will to power," has been well established by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche Interpretationen I, Über Werden und Wille zur Macht* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), *passim*. However, if "there are" wills to power, and "wills to power" are all that "there is," then Heidegger (Müller-Lauter's main target) may still be right in claiming that, for Nietzsche, the meaning of "being" is "will to power," or "will to power" is the "being of beings," the "beingness" (*oysia, Seiendheit*) of *all* beings, and hence a metaphysical thesis in the sense of a theory of *everything*, a thesis about "the whole," the totality of beings.

<sup>13</sup> See also, for example, how in one of the posthumous fragments on the body as a "guiding thread," Nietzsche insists on this idea that the interpretation of the body's "thinking, feeling, willing" is a "moral" and not a "mechanistic" problem (KSA 11. 576, 37[4]). To speak of the "body" here, Nietzsche says, is, in fact, only "the best metaphor" (*das beste Gleichniß*) we have (KSA 11. 576, 37[4]). On each drive as a "will to power" and the organism as a multiplicity of "wills to power," cf. the posthumous fragment quoted in the following note (KSA 12. 25, 1[58]). For the drives as "evaluations" (*Werthschätzungen*), cf. for example, KSA 11. 167, 26[72].

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, KSA 12. 25, 1[58]: "From each of our basic drives there results a different perspectival evaluation of any event and

experience. Each one of these drives feels, towards each of the others, impeded or instigated, or flattered, each one has its own law of development (its ups and downs, its rhythm, etc.)—and one is dying, while another grows. Man as a multiplicity of wills to power: each with a multiplicity of modes of expression and forms.” This multiplicity is a multiplicity of “under-souls” (BGE 19), or of “animate beings,” “intelligences” (KSA 11. 282, 27[27], KSA 11. 576, 37[4]), precisely insofar as its elements are percipient “perspectives.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. GS 357, GS 354.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Patrick Wotling, *La philosophie de l'esprit libre, Introduction à Nietzsche* (Paris, Flammarion, 2008), 240-48; Patrick Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation* (Paris, PUF, 1995), 83-108; cf. also Patrick Wotling, “What Language do Drives Speak,” in *Nietzsche on Instinct and Language*, ed. J. Constâncio and M.J.M. Branco (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 63-79. On these dynamics, see also J. Constâncio, “On Consciousness: Nietzsche’s Departure from Schopenhauer,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 40 (2011), 1-42, and on the Nietzschean sense of “interpretation,” see J. Constâncio, “Nietzsche and Normativity,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 51 (2022), 1-38.

<sup>17</sup> Cf., for example, D 119 and KSA 11. 167, 26[72], KSA 11. 175, 26[94], KSA 11. 503, 34[247], KSA 12. 315, 7[60]. Note how, inasmuch as drives are processes, they are in constant transformation, which means even their number varies.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the seminal studies by Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA/London, England: Harvard University Press, 1985), esp. 74-104; and Werner Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Fluktanz. Dilthey und Nietzsche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992). On relational character of objects and subjects, see, for example, KSA 11. 560, 36 [22], KSA 13. 275, 14[79]; on the rejection of the concept of essence in Nietzsche’s published works, cf. GM II 12-13; on the rejection of the concept of substance, see GS 111, TI ‘Reason’ 2, TI ‘Reason’ 5 (cf. also BGE 12-17, 21-22, 34, 36, GM I 13).

<sup>19</sup> See also GS 112, TI 'Errors' 3, KSA 12. 101, 2[83]; 12. 103, 2[84]; 12. 135, 2[139]; 12. 383, 89[91]; 12. 391, 9[98]; 12. 465, 10[19]; 12. 549, 10[58].

<sup>20</sup> See KSA 12. 417, 9[144]; see BGE 262: "*A species* originates, a type grows sturdy and strong, in the long struggle with essentially constant *unfavorable* conditions."

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the difference between drive (*Trieb*) and instinct (*Instinkt*), as well as of this relation between instinct and character, see João Constâncio, "Instinct and Language in Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil," in *Nietzsche on Instinct and Language*, ed. J. Constâncio and M.J.M. Branco (Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2011), 80-116. See Luca Lupo, *Le Colombe dello Scettico, Riflessioni di Nietzsche sulla Coscienza negli anni 1880-1888* (Pisa: ETS, 2006), 75 ff.

<sup>22</sup> See also, for example, GS 347, GM II 2, TI Skirmishes 49.

<sup>23</sup> See also KSA, 12. 135, 2[139]; 12. 137, 2[142]; 12. 383, 89[91]; 13. 257, 14[79]; 13. 260, 14[81]. Note that, as in BGE 22, in all these passages it is obvious that it is not merely a question of the organism not being ruled by a law that would correspond to its character, but, beyond that, that in all of nature what we consider a "law" is merely a "relation of power" (KSA 12. 135, 2[139]) and that "every power draws its final consequences at every moment" (BGE 22, KSA 13. 257, 14[79]). "The *real as a whole* must, in the light of the organism, be thought of as non-substantial and therefore as devoid of essences and laws. If a given power-relation repeats itself and always appears to be the same, this only means that 'one and the same force cannot be another force'" (KSA 12. 135, 2[139]), i.e., it always produces the same "effects." Power relations are relations between "*quanta* of force" (*Kraft-Quanta*, *Macht-Quanta*), thus between singular processes whose qualities are only produced in the relation of some processes to others. If this also "is only an interpretation," as Nietzsche says, "well then, so much the better" (BGE 22).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Volker Gerhardt, "Selbstbegründung. Nietzsches Moral der Individualität," *Nietzsche-Studien* 21 (1992), 28-49, in particular, 41-42; cf. also: GM II 2 com HH I 221, AS 159.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Constâncio, "'A Sort of Schema of Ourselves': On Nietzsche's 'Ideal' and 'Concept' of Freedom," *Nietzsche-Studien* 41 (2012), 127-62.

<sup>26</sup> Note how Nietzsche uses the phrase "my instinct" as synonymous with character, or rather, as a new (anti-Kantian and anti-Schopenhauerian) description of character.

<sup>27</sup> See the same notion of "artistic plan" in GS 290.

<sup>28</sup> This idea should be connected to another of Nietzsche's ideas—that consciousness is "the latest development of the organic" (GS 11), and that its activity is therefore often an impediment to the normal functioning of the organism. Thus, Nietzsche writes, "we deny that anything can be made perfect as long as it is still being made conscious" (A 14); conscious states can only be useful if they can be incorporated, i.e., made unconscious.

<sup>29</sup> See Paul Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Theory of Mind: Consciousness and Conceptualization," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2005), 1-25.

<sup>30</sup> See BGE 268, GS 354, and, for example, KSA 11. 64, 25[185]; 11. 434, 34[46]; 11. 464, 34[131]; 11. 576, 37[4]; 12. 26, 1[61]; 12. 29, 1[75]

<sup>31</sup> On the concept of "incorporation" (*Einverleibung*), see Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche-Interpretationen I, Über Werden und Wille zur Macht* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 54-62; Günter Abel, "Bewußtsein—Sprache—Natur: Nietzsches Philosophie des Geistes," *Nietzsche-Studien* 30 (2001), 1-43, 7-8; John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (Oxford/New York: 2004), 101-103, 174, 209; see GS 11, 110, 111 (also GS 21, 135), BM 213, 230, 259, GM II 1, KSA 9. 494, 11[41]; 9. 503, 11[162]; 9. 543, 11[268]; 9. 583, 12[40]; 10. 593, 20[10]; 11. 650, 24[14]; 11. 269, 26[448]; 11. 608, 38[10]; 12. 424, 9[151]. Note that Nietzsche describes incorporation as a form of "digestion" and "assimilation," which introduces the metaphorical image of consciousness as a "stomach," i.e., an "organ" of spiritual digestion and assimilation (BGE 230, KSA 11. 282, 27[26]). On the notion that, psychologically, no state is the «direct cause» of another state (and neither, therefore, of any action), see KSA 11. 434, 34[46].

<sup>32</sup> On the critique of this kind of causality, see, for example, GS 112 and KSA 13. 274-276, 14[98]M—a critique that affects both the

traditional notion of "free will" and the traditional notion of determinism (see BGE 21-22).

<sup>33</sup> On the pivotal role of the concept of *continuum* in Nietzsche's reflections on consciousness, see Günter Abel, "Bewußtsein- Sprache- Natur: Nietzsches Philosophie des Geistes," *Nietzsche-Studien* 30 (2001), 1-43.

<sup>34</sup> Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 89 ff., is therefore right when he holds—drawing on Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies* 75 (1994), 5-24—that "If, in other words, we are not *causa sui*, then everything about our will (and, consequently, about our actions) is causally determined by something about the 'way we already are'—including those operations of will in which we attempt to alter the 'way we already are.'" "Conscious and intentional procedures" are merely links in the causal chain. The point, however, is that this does not imply that they are effects that do not produce other effects (i.e., it only means that they are effects, rather than *causa sui*). Leiter's interpretation is also misleading in attributing to Nietzsche a naturalized version of the Schopenhauerian doctrine of the immutability of character. If we are to think of conscious states as caused by the "way we are" (or the relation between character and circumstances), we need not assume that the "way we are" is innate and immutable. We have seen that Nietzsche clearly rejects such a view of character. Note also that Strawson and Leiter's argument is already found in Schopenhauer: see PFW, 33-44. Since the motives of human actions include "abstract thoughts" (i.e., "motives" in the proper sense of the term), the human "mode of motivation" is different from that of animals—yet, Schopenhauer argues, "the necessity of the effect of motives is not at all cancelled, nor even diminished" (PFW, 35-36).

<sup>35</sup> Note that the creation of new values is a transformation of the "will" of the organism—a freedom *of the will* ("*Veränderung der Wertschätzung ist Veränderung des Willens*," KSA 9. 192, 5[46]), but this "will" is neither conscious nor unified: it is merely the effect of the coordination and hierarchization of the "under-wills" that make up the body (BGE 19).

<sup>36</sup> E.g., WWV I §55, 347, §66, 435, PGM §20, 249; see Seneca, *Epistulae*, LXXXI, 81.

<sup>37</sup> See WWV I §§17-19, WWV II §§19-22.

<sup>38</sup> See KSA 11. 282, 27[27]; 11. 576, 37[4]. In this last posthumous fragment, Nietzsche goes so far as to speak of a multiplicity of “consciousnesses”—which, however, remains unconscious! Note that, at least in some contexts, Nietzsche does not distinguish between “soul” and “subject,” since, as he puts it, the “subject” is merely a trendy academic term to speak of the “soul” (“*die ‘Seele’ oder das Subjekt, wie die Schulsprache jetzt statt Seele sagt*,” KSA 11. 565, 36[36]).

<sup>39</sup> On Nietzsche’s reinterpretation of the Schopenhauerian method of taking the subjectivity of the lived body as a starting point (WWV I §17 ss.)—and, in particular, on the Nietzschean motto of philosophizing “*am Leitfaden des Leibes*” (“along the guiding thread of the body”) and its relation to Schopenhauer’s understanding of human subjectivity, see Jörg Salaquarda, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysik und ihre Vorbereitung durch Schopenhauer,” in *Krisis der Metaphysik*, Ed. G. Abel and J. Salaquarda (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 258-82, and Jörg Salaquarda, “Leib bin ich ganz und gar...—Zum ‘dritten Weg’ bei Schopenhauer und Nietzsche,” *Nietzscheforschung Band 1* (1994), 37-50. Nietzsche’s posthumous fragments where the idea of philosophizing “along the guiding thread of the body” are KSA 11. 249, 26[374]; 11. 266, 26[432]; 11. 282, 27[27]; 11. 565, 36[35]; 11. 576, 37[4]; 11. 623, 39[13]; 11. 692, 42[3]; KSA 12. 92, 2[68]; 12. 92, 2[70]; 11. 106, 2[91]; KSA 11. 638, 40[21] (*Ausgangspunkt vom Leibe und der Physiologie*); 12. 205, 5[56]. See also J. Constâncio, “On Nietzsche’s Conception of Philosophy in *Beyond Good and Evil*: Reassessing Schopenhauer’s Relevance,” in M.E. Born and A. Pichler (Hrsgs.), *Texturen des Denkens: Nietzsches Inszenierung der Philosophie in “Jenseits von Gut und Böse,”* (Berlin/ Boston, De Gruyter, 2013), 145-64.

<sup>40</sup> Note that in the posthumous note that suggests the body and physiology as a “starting point,” Nietzsche expressly says that “the most important thing” is that we understand dominant drives and dominated

drives as being "of the same kind," i.e., as "feeling, willing, thinking"—and that "wherever we see or guess movement in the body, we learn to infer an invisible *subjective* life to match it" (KSA 11. 638, 40[21], emphasis added). The multiplicity of drives and affects is, therefore, subjectivity, or "subjective life"—albeit "invisible," not-conscious.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, BGE 17, 34, 54, TI "Reason" 3 e 5, GS 354, KSA 11. 526, 35[35]; 11. 613, 38[14]; 11. 650, 40[42]; 12. 101, 2[83]; 12. 315, 7[60]; 12. 391, 9[98]; 12. 398, 9[108]; 12. 417, 9[144]; 12. 465, 10[19]; 13. 53, 11[113]; 13. 257, 14[79].

<sup>42</sup> See also KSA 11. 650, 40[42] ("das Subjekt als Vielheit," "the subject as multiplicity").

<sup>43</sup> See, once again, the posthumous note quoted above: "all unity is unity *only as organization and coordination*" (KSA 12. 104, 2[87]).

<sup>44</sup> See BT and, especially, TI Skirmishes 8-12—where intoxication is described as a "feeling of fullness and increasing strength" (TI Skirmishes 8).

<sup>45</sup> On the concept of "spirit" (*Geist*) in Nietzsche, see Werner Stegmaier, "Geist. Hegel, Nietzsche und die Gegenwart," *Nietzsche-Studien* 26 (1997), 300-18; cf. also GM III 12 on the notion that the philosopher's "objectivity" demands a maximum of subjectivation—i.e., it demands that they summon their affects (their inclinations and aversions) and multiply the number of their perspectives on the problems they are dealing with. On the intrinsically personal (and, in this sense, subjective) nature of Nietzsche's philosophy, see also Werner Stegmaier, *Philosophie der Fluktuanz. Dilthey und Nietzsche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 282 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Cf., for example, in *Daybreak*, the way in which Nietzsche conceives of the drives in aphorisms 119 and 129. On this whole conception of "properly human" (or not merely animal) consciousness as "awareness supplemented by conceptualization," see J. Constâncio, "On Consciousness: Nietzsche's Departure from Schopenhauer," *Nietzsche-Studien* 40 (2011), 1-42.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Julius Robert Mayer, "Über Auslösung" [1876], "Die Mechanik der Wärme," *Sämtliche Schriften, Münzenmayer*, ed. J.R. Mayer,

(Heilbronn: Stadtarchiv Heilbronn, 1978). Mayer's influence on Nietzsche is established by Günter Abel, *Nietzsche, Die Dynamik der Willen Zur Macht und die ewige Wiederkehr* (Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2. Auflage, 1998), 43 ff.

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