



Bridgewater State University

Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University

Honors Program Theses and Projects

Undergraduate Honors Program

5-6-2020

Towards an Understanding of Nietzsche's Will to Power

Jeffrey Beery

Bridgewater State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beery, Jeffrey. (2020). Towards an Understanding of Nietzsche's Will to Power. In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 316. Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/316

Copyright © 2020 Jeffrey Beery

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

Towards an Understanding of Nietzsche's Will to Power

Jeffrey Allen Beery

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Philosophy

Bridgewater State University

May 6, 2020

Dr. William J. Devlin, Thesis Advisor

Dr. Aeon J. Skoble, Committee Member

Dr. Matthew R. Dasti, Committee Member

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abbreviation Key | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Chapter I: Nietzsche’s Madman | 7 |
| Part I: “God is Dead”..... | 7 |
| Part II: Nihilism..... | 11 |
| Chapter II: Will as Will to Power | 18 |
| Section I: Truth, Perspectivism, and Power | 18 |
| Section II: Will to Power as Metaphysics | 23 |
| Part I: The Metaphysical Interpretation | 23 |
| Part II: Objections | 28 |
| Section III: Will to Power as Metaphor..... | 32 |
| Part I: The Metaphorical Interpretation..... | 32 |
| Part II: Objections | 36 |
| Chapter III: Psychology of the Will to Power | 39 |
| Section I: Will to Power as psychology in the Published Works..... | 39 |
| Section II: First- vs Second-Order Drives | 45 |
| Section III: Perspectivism and Will to Power | 48 |
| Section IV: “God is Dead” and Nihilism | 52 |
| Conclusion | 56 |
| Bibliography | 57 |

Abbreviation Key

| | |
|------------|---|
| BT | <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> |
| UM | <i>Untimely Meditations</i> |
| TL | <i>On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense</i> |
| HH | <i>Human, All Too Human</i> |
| GS | <i>The Gay Science</i> |
| TZ | <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> |
| BGE | <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> |
| GM | <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> |
| WP | <i>The Will to Power</i> |
| EN | <i>Writings from the Early Notebooks</i> |
| LN | <i>Writings from the Late Notebooks</i> |

Introduction

Given his aphoristic writing style, his poetical and metaphorical depictions of philosophical ideas, and his presentations of seemingly logically contradictory or inconsistent views, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy lends itself to a variety of competing interpretations among scholars and a plethora of misconceptions among everyday readers. These misconceptions have invited many negative connotations to be attributed to his philosophy, including Nazism, misogyny, and egoism. Amongst his most misconstrued concepts is the Will to Power, a concept Nietzsche himself never explicitly defines, but discusses in a variety of ways throughout his texts. For instance, in the *Will to Power* Nietzsche claims, "[My theory would be:--] that the will to power is the primitive form of affect, [and] that all other affects are only developments of it" (WP: 688). However, later in the *Will to Power* he claims, "This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!" (WP: 1067). Meanwhile in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he professes, "Where I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of those who serve, I found the will to be master... [and] only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but—thus I teach you—will to power" (TZ: 12). Given the inconsistencies among the passages above, it is no wonder that debates regarding the Will often leave scholars with greatly diverging interpretations of the concept.

Of these interpretations the three most prominent are (1) the metaphysical interpretation; (2) the metaphorical interpretation; and (3) the psychological interpretation. Regarding the former, some scholars—notably Martin Heidegger, and John Richardson—construe the Will to Power as an absolute objective certainty which makes up the main driving force behind all nature and reality. Under this interpretation the universe and all that inhabits it does not merely express a Will to Power, but rather *is* a Will to Power. This central driving force is to be understood as nature's inherent drive to perpetually spread out its power over the whole. That is, all reality/all

living things are in a constant power struggle amongst each other, in order to spread out and strengthen their power. In this regard, the metaphysical interpretation has been labeled as a negative expression of the Will to Power, whereby the Will is directed externally upon other objects and persons.

Turning to another view, held most prominently by Wayne Klein, is the metaphorical interpretation. Under the metaphorical interpretation, the Will to Power is treated as a ‘fiction’ or ‘pseudo’ concept which should be accepted based on its pragmatic applications alone. In this sense, Nietzsche offers the Will to Power as a new metaphor in response to the loss of the religious/artistic construct of God. Here, the Will to Power serves as a new construct that promotes a celebration of individualism and affirmation of life.

The last interpretation, most famously articulated by Walter Kaufmann, construes the Will to Power as the fundamental principle behind all of human psychology. In contrast with the metaphysical interpretation, the Will is conceived not as applying to all nature and reality generally, but rather only to rational beings, acting as the central driving force behind all human psychological drives. Whereas the Will is directed externally under the metaphysical conception, as power over persons and objects, it is commonly accepted that the psychological interpretation regards the Will as directed internally.

Beyond this descriptive issue—which is the focus of this essay—a key normative issue arises. Does will to power invite immoralism, amoralism or moral chaos? This position is brought forward by Philippa Foot. Undoubtedly, this is a concern that requires a response from any serious Nietzsche scholar, especially those writing on will to power. This essay works as a foundation through which this pressing normative question may eventually find resolve. As I view it, this issue can only be addressed *after* one first establishes a response to the descriptive

issue. Thus, my thesis aims to settle the descriptive problem once and for all. In doing so, I aim to present Nietzsche's will to power as a central concept in his philosophy, a task which has tempted many a venture and is often met with failure. I believe, however, that my strategy is unique. Rather than proffer a postmodern interpretation of Nietzsche which holds that his philosophy is one of radical subjectivity, or even an interpretation which dismisses his philosophy as clumsily inconsistent, I propose that it is possible to develop a consistent—even somewhat systematic—reading of will to power in the context of Nietzsche's larger philosophy. Specifically, I suggest that a proper interpretation of will to power can be developed through an understanding of Nietzsche's complementary notions: the death of God and nihilism. I view each of these notions as psychological in nature and argue that will to power should be understood in the same light.

Chapter 1: Nietzsche's Madman

In this thesis, I suggest that the will to power belongs to Nietzsche's philosophical response to accepting atheism and the subsequent forms of nihilism that follow. Viewing each of these notions from the standpoint of psychology, I contend that Nietzsche's will to power is best understood as psychological in its formulation. Thus, before examining the more popular interpretations of will to power, I will set the stage in this chapter with an analysis of these two notions within Nietzsche's published and unpublished works.

Part I: "God is Dead"

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche presents what is perhaps his most controversial, yet philosophically significant, aphorism—"The Madman"—which pronounces the death of God. Nietzsche writes:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace, and cried incessantly, 'I seek God! I seek God!' As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter... 'Whither is God' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while? Must not lanterns be lit in the

morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? God's too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him... Who will wipe this blood off of us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent... Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.' Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. 'I have come too early,' he said then; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars require time; deeds, though still done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars— and yet they have done it themselves. (GS: 125)

“God is dead” professes the madman and all the values that had once been justified and emphasized under God have died and decayed with him. This marks one of Nietzsche's central theses, a thesis which diagnoses the decline and recession of western civilization and its generations to come. Before a more meticulous analysis can take hold on this thesis it is essential that we better understand what Nietzsche means when he proclaims, “God is dead”. This pronouncement brings two questions to the forefront. First, in what sense does Nietzsche view God? Second, given Nietzsche's understanding of God, how is it that God can be killed? To begin, when Nietzsche discusses God, he is not referring to an actually existent metaphysical entity, but rather, what he regards as a manmade artistic creation. Here, Nietzsche inverts the

Biblical story of creation held in *Genesis*: rather than understand man as created in God's image, Nietzsche understands God as anthropomorphically created in man's image. God is a myth posited to help humanity better understand and cope with the horrors of existence. Like his predecessor Arthur Schopenhauer, and later his successor Albert Camus, Nietzsche recognizes humanity's historically rich struggle with the terrors that accompany our existence. Particularly, that humanity must contend with the value of human existence in the context of one's own mortality.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche offers a case study of the Ancient Greeks to evaluate their response to the quest for meaning in the face of death. Here, Nietzsche recounts the wisdom of Silenus, which states, "What is best of all is utterly beyond [one's] reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for [one] is—to die soon" (BT:3). Nietzsche's analysis of the Greek response to this problem acts as the backbone to his understanding of all divine myths that have been posited hitherto. According to Nietzsche, "The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dreambirth of the Olympians" (BT:3). It is only under the veil of these myths that life appears justified, unified, and purposeful. Therefore, for Nietzsche, a God hypothesis is humanity's response to the "terror and horror of existence."

Having established a basis for Nietzsche's conception of God we can now address the latter concern: how is it that God—a myth—can be killed? Ironically, it is through the same processes that the same myths and hypothesis come to meet their destruction and rejection. Nietzsche regards the death of a god merely as a loss of belief, holding, "The greatest recent event—that 'God is dead,' [results in that the] belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable" (GS: 343). This loss of belief arises in one of two ways. On the one hand we have

the social rejection or cultural dismissal of the Western, Judeo-Christian God. On the other, we have the deeply rooted philosophical rejection. Socially, a god is dismissed when humanity comes to recognize the un-tenability of its belief in a god. In this sense, a god fails to adequately mask the terrors and horrors of existence; this is what occurred with the rise of rationalism and materialism in Europe throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

While the social rejection of the Western God has historical relevance, the philosophical rejection of God is of major importance to this analysis. This philosophical rejection is grounded in the view that the Western God fails to actualize its *telos*—to justify life by providing value to human existence. In understanding why, the concept of God fails to provide value to life for Nietzsche, we can introduce a distinction between two types of value: *intrinsic value* and *extrinsic value*. We can define intrinsic value as “the value that that thing has “in itself,” or “for its own sake,” or “as such,” or “in its own right.” Meanwhile, extrinsic value is the instrumental value that a thing has, or the value “*for the sake of something else* to which it is related in some way” (Zimmerman and Bradley 2019). In clarifying this distinction, consider for a moment a motivated poet. The poet could produce poetry for the value of producing poetry in and of itself. Or, the poet could surely produce poetry solely for the sake of the glamour and high praise of an audience. The former represents the poet producing poetry with intrinsic value in mind, as the poems are created for their own sake (the internal value of poetry). Meanwhile, the latter represents the poet as producing poetry solely out of an extrinsic sense of value, as the poems are created for the sake of something else (the external value of praise).

Returning now to the death of God, we can see that Nietzsche contends the Judeo-Christian God fails to provide human life with intrinsic value. The Western God posits the aim and purpose of human existence to exist beyond this world in a transcendent realm. In so doing,

God designates only an extrinsic value to human existence—to live only for the sake of something external to life (the value of entering heaven). It is for this reason, perhaps, that Nietzsche applauds the pantheism of the Greeks, for their gods participated in the human circus, expressing jealousy, lust, hate, and envy, as well as, joy, and happiness. As Nietzsche writes, the [Greek] gods justified human life by living it themselves—the only satisfactory theodicy ever invented (BT: 3). Humanity could relate to these deities, and for these reasons feel transposed by these deities. However, this is not the case with the Judeo-Christian deity. By exporting value from this life to a transcendent realm, the Judeo-Christian God hypothesis lacks this relatability, and we soon realize that humanity is no longer entitled to the “afterworlds and false divinities” that the hypothesis once offered us (WP:12). That is, humanity recognizes that God posits all value extrinsically and devalues all that is intrinsic to us, including this world. Hence, the Western God hypothesis is philosophically dead.

Part II: Nihilism

We can now turn towards a more meticulous analysis of Nietzsche’s parable of “The madman.” Nietzsche’s madman is not to be recognized as an individual battling madness *qua* insanity, but rather as a character diagnosing the decline of a generation, and thus viewed as an outsider in that generation. In many ways the madman allows us to recognize the views Nietzsche attributed to his own philosophy, a philosophy he regarded as written for the few, and a philosophy that he accepts is recognized as ‘mad’ from the outsider’s perspective of tradition. Nietzsche views his audience as consisting of two sorts. First, we have the 19th century Europeans who maintain faith in God, and thus ignore Nietzsche’s pronouncement. Second, we have those who have dismissed their belief in God but have failed to accept an authentic atheism, and thus still live in what Nietzsche refers to as “God’s shadow” (GS: 108). The importance of Nietzsche’s madman is not

simply to announce the death of the Judeo-Christian God (as his pronouncement was made to “those who do not believe in God”), but rather to reveal the true consequences that arise from a genuine dismissal of the God hypothesis.

Nietzsche argues that to abandon faith in God is to invite to the forefront the “uncanniest of all guests,” for without God “Nihilism stands at the door” (WP:1). Nietzsche’s madman challenges the atheists in his presence to open their doors, and to accept the consequences of an authentic atheism. As the madman views it, the atheists of the 19th century have failed to ask themselves the central question, “What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun?” (GS:125). Just as the Earth is inherently defined by its orbit around the sun, so, too, Nietzsche suggests that human existence has been defined by an interconnection to God. The God hypothesis offers us a way to order and structure our lives in a meaningful way. So, what happens when humans destroy this organizing principle? The answer to this question has already been suggested above: Nietzsche harkens the advent of nihilism. But what exactly is nihilism?

To begin, nihilism is derived from the Latin word *nihil*, which is best translated as “nothing.” In philosophical tradition, nihilism can be understood as the view that life has no value, meaning, and purpose. Nietzsche echoes this definition as he states, “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer” (WP 2). In this regard, Nietzsche views the highest values, that is, all that was thought to give meaning, and purpose to the world, as valueless once nihilism steps to the forefront. To adopt an authentic atheism is to devalue all that was once valued, to remove all meaning, and purpose from the world around us. Therefore, as the madman points out, to thoroughly remove the belief in God—or to have unchained the earth from its sun—is to lose all sense of direction.

It entails one to plummet “[b]ackward, sideward, forward, in all directions,” and to face a chaotic upheaval of order and unity, and therefore enter a nihilistic age (GS:125).

In providing a more detailed analysis of nihilism it is important to turn to Nietzsche’s posthumously published work, *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche most lucidly discusses the devaluations associated with the death of God and nihilism in aphorism twelve. Here, he discusses three ways nihilism arises as a “psychological state.” First, nihilism develops when we recognize that “we have sought a ‘meaning’ in all events that is not there” (WP:12). In this regard, nihilism entails an entire loss of meaning and purpose. Under the God hypothesis, human existence was given a *telos*, or final end or purpose. For instance, in Christianity, God offers the goal of human existence through the model of Jesus. Here, humans are born with a pre-determined essence to be like Christ. Thus, to disband oneself with God is to recognize that the world can no longer be viewed as operating under a *telos*. We seem to have no sense of direction, and we come to ask ourselves, why? But as Nietzsche points out, we find no answer. Life can no longer be interpreted as having any absolute aim or purpose.

According to Nietzsche, nihilism is reached secondly when “one has posited a totality, a systematization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events” (WP: 12). The God hypothesis had posited this organization, placing God as the *erste Ursache* or first cause of all things. To be, under this hypothesis is to participate in the divine, to share in God’s creation and be placed in intimate harmony with all other thought and substance. But if we no longer have God as a foundation, we soon come to realize that the world does not represent the unity that we once attributed to it. Viewing the world without a God’s eye view we soon realize that “the total character of the world...is in all eternity chaos” (GS: 109). In this regard, nihilism results from

removing God—the fundamental organizing principle for human beings—from one’s way of life. Thus, without it, the human beings once ordered frame of life becomes chaos.

Nihilism arises in yet a third way when an individual recognizes that the metaphysical world posited to help respond to the horrors of existence is “fabricated solely from psychological needs” (WP: 12).¹ To better understand these needs, it is important to relate back to the beginning of section one. Humanity is constantly terrorized by the thought of impermanence. Everything we love, cherish, and value will one day cease to exist, for nothing can escape the chaotic cycle of becoming and unbecoming. As Nietzsche puts it, a “*true world*,” or a heaven in the Judeo-Christian sense, is posited to cope with this terrifying idea, and to instill in life something eternal. As Nietzsche points out, however, once humanity digests that “God is dead,” a *true world* will no longer be possible. Authentic atheists will acknowledge that such a world is actually a fabricated realm, born out of the same artistic impulses that created the God hypothesis. Thus, we are no longer entitled any access to such a realm, and any hope of an afterlife is diminished.

At bottom, nihilism is followed by these major losses. Life no longer appears to have a purpose, and the world lacks any inherent order, unification, or structure. We lose any access to an afterlife, and the *true world* is revealed as nothing more than an illusory *false world*. As Nietzsche argues, under nihilism “the categories ‘aim,’ ‘unity,’ ‘being’ which we used to project some value into the world—we pull out again; so the world looks valueless” (WP: 12). From these losses results two further losses. Without a *true world*, the epistemic and moral theories that have for thousands of year’s predominated Western culture and thought devalue themselves. Without the God hypothesis, morality loses its sanctions, and truth is shown to fail to obtain absolutely.

¹ As such, the death of God and the nihilism that follow appear to be viewed by Nietzsche as psychological phenomenon.

What occurs is a naturalization of humanity, or as Nietzsche puts it, the “de-deification of nature” (GS: 109).

In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche distinguishes between two forms of nihilism. The first form, influenced by Schopenhauerian pessimism, is what Nietzsche refers to as *passive nihilism*, which he defines as the “decline and recession of the power of the spirit” (WP: 22). Like Nietzsche’s general understanding of nihilism, passive nihilism follows from the death of God and entails a loss of all value, meaning, and purpose. Furthermore, under passive nihilism, the individual takes the consequences that follow this death pessimistically. For the passive nihilist, the loss of purpose, unity, morality, truth, and access to an afterlife or *true world*, act as further negations to life. Here, the passive nihilist wholeheartedly agrees with the Wisdom of Silenus. Life becomes meaningless, and all value, whether it be intrinsic or extrinsic is removed from the world. The passive nihilist accepts the death of God and the consequences that follow. This means that it rejects the method of offering an extrinsic value to life that the God hypothesis offers. At the same time, the passive nihilist resigns himself to accepting that life not only lacks extrinsic value, but also any intrinsic value. Like Silenus’ wisdom, not only is there no afterlife, but there is no point to living *this* life.

In this regard, the passive nihilist resigns himself to defeat in the face of the terror and horror of existence and, as Nietzsche points out, fails to ever offer a healthy, life-affirming, response. Rather, the passive nihilist seeks “whatever refreshes, heals, calms, numbs,” simply so one can continue on living. At bottom, the passive nihilist is trying to move beyond nihilism without “revaluating [their] values,” but as Nietzsche points out, this only makes the nihilistic problem more severe (WP: 28). All that is valued by the passive nihilist is pleasure and the absence of pain, and if the pleasure is to be revoked then so is the individual’s will to live.

Nietzsche was deeply puzzled by the way in which passive nihilism offered a further negation to life. In Nietzsche's "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" (1886), a retrospective forward to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, he poses a question: "Is pessimism inevitably a sign of decadence...or is there such a thing as a strong pessimism?" We can take Nietzsche to answer this question in the affirmative with his second notion of nihilism: *active nihilism*. Nietzsche proposes this position as an alternative view towards passive nihilism, since active nihilism is "a sign of increased power of the spirit" (WP: 22). It is a response to its more decadent forms. For Nietzsche, the goal of active nihilism is not life negation, but rather life affirmation. Thus, active nihilism replaces its passive counterparts "no" to life with a sacred "yes". As Nietzsche describes it, the active nihilist views the death of God differently, not as a dark cataclysmic event, but rather as accompanied with a "scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, [and] exhilaration" (GS: 343). While the passive nihilist myopically sees the death of God as a loss of structure and meaning, whereby we "unchain the earth from its sun" or "eclipse the sun", the active nihilist sees this death positively as an opportunity. Here, the removal of God reveals an open sea, "at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger" (GS: 343). The active nihilist contends that the lack of a *true world* does not give us sufficient reason to denounce the earth. Instead, this lack entails the freedom of the spirit, for there is no place on earth one cannot now search for meaning, and one can finally reevaluate all those values that have been stripped away.

Thus, rather than resign oneself to complete pessimism, the active nihilist fights the horror and terror of existence by *creating* meaning, purpose, and value in *this* life. This nihilist projects an intrinsic value to *this* life, here and now. In this sense, the active nihilist is what I refer to as an *optimistic-pessimist*: a pessimist in that he accepts that the highest values devalue

themselves and that life loses the traditional understanding of meaning, purpose, and value; but optimistic, in that he believes he can combat this loss through artistic creation. Just as human beings created God and projected this concept as an organizing principle upon the world, so too, Nietzsche suggests that the active nihilist channels one's artistic impulses to create an alternative, life-affirming, worldview whereby intrinsic value is restored to human existence. In so doing, the active nihilist is able "to stand the wisdom of Silenus on its head and proclaim that it was the worst evil for man to die soon, and second worst for him to die at all" (BT: 3).

As such, Nietzsche seems to treat the death of God and the nihilism that follows as psychological pathologies. I argue, that if we are to treat will to power as a central concept within Nietzsche's philosophy, it must be understood in light of the human, psychological, and existential loss of God. In the following chapters, I will present three prominent academic interpretations of will to power—the (1) metaphysical; (2) metaphorical; and (3) psychological interpretations. My analysis of each of these interpretations will be centered around how well each respond to these losses.

Chapter 2: Will as Will to Power

Having analyzed Nietzsche's philosophical notions of the death of God and the nihilism that follows, we are now in a better position to undergo a proper analysis of the will to power. To begin, it is important that we first address a related understanding of the will which Nietzsche criticizes, in one way or another, as failing to offer an account of the human condition, in light of the death of God. This is what Nietzsche refers to as the "will to truth."

I: Truth, Perspectivism, and Power

Nietzsche's first published presentation of will to power can be found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There, Nietzsche introduces this concept as a way to analyze another concept of will: the will to truth. Nietzsche writes:

"Will to truth," you who are wisest call that which impels you and fills you with lust? A will to the thinkability of all beings: this I call your will. You want to *make* all being thinkable, for you doubt with well-founded suspicion that it is already thinkable. But shall yield and bend for you. Thus your will wants it. It shall become smooth and serve the spirit as its mirror and reflection. That is your whole will, you who are wisest: a will to power—when you speak of good and evil too, and of valuations. You still want to create the world before which you can kneel: that is your ultimate hope and intoxication.

(TZ: 12)

The above aphorism highlights Nietzsche's central attack against western epistemology. To understand this attack, it is important that we examine how Nietzsche views 'truth.' Following Richard Schacht, we can say that Nietzsche refers to 'truth' in at least two ways. On the one hand there are *metaphysical truths*, or truths "espoused by metaphysical and religious thinkers [and]

wedded to the idea of some sort of reality transcending the world in which we live....” (Schacht 1995,79). Metaphysical truths are absolute and universal truths which obtain independent of human consciousness, and rest fundamentally on an objective foundation, whether God, science, or the ‘thing-in-itself.’ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche claims that without the “hidden god [or] thing-in-itself,” metaphysical truths would have no origin (BGE 2).² On the other hand, there are *man’s truths*, or truths which have “come to be considered ‘truths’ in various commonplace domains of discourse” (79). These truths are considered relative in that they obtain dependent on human consciousness and focus on, and apply to, the human condition and perspective.

Now, Nietzsche initially presents the will to truth as a will towards achieving metaphysical truths (and not simply “man’s truths”). But, ultimately, he critiques this drive in at least three ways. First, given the death of God, Nietzsche is skeptical of being able to discern metaphysical truths in the first place. On the one hand, Nietzsche considers the death of God to entail a move away from postulations of a transcendent metaphysical world. He admits “there may be a metaphysical world” but concludes that “knowledge of such a world would be of least consequence—of even less consequence than knowledge of the chemical analysis of water would be to a storm tossed mariner” (HH: 9). On the other hand, the death of God entails the further loss of an epistemic ‘God’s eye view’ whereby we are able to adjudicate our knowledge-claims in reference to a transcendent metaphysical world. Thus, Nietzsche rejects access to metaphysical truths and subsequently adopts the epistemic position of *perspectivism*. Perhaps the most famous aphorism discussing Nietzsche’s perspectivism is presented in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

My dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a “pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject”; let us guard against the

² As Nietzsche elaborates, even if there were a transcendent metaphysical world, “we [human beings] see all things through the medium of the human head and we cannot well cut off this head....nothing could be predicated of the metaphysical world beyond the fact that it is an elsewhere, another sphere, inaccessible and incomprehensible to us: it would become a thing of negative properties” (HH: 9).

snarers of such contradictory concepts as “pure reason,” “absolute spirituality”, “knowledge in itself”: these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective “knowing”; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity” be. (GM: III:12)

Here, Nietzsche encapsulates his critique of traditional epistemology and the notion of metaphysical truths, reducing the concepts of ‘pure reason’ and ‘knowledge in itself’ to contradictory snarers. Instead, knowledge is dependent on perspectives, each of which is unique and held as ‘true’ in the eyes of an “individual, a community, a race, a state, a faith, [or] a culture” (WP:259). Truth is thus not to be rendered objective but subjective, and the world itself is not to obtain in any one meaning, but a variety of meanings; different interpretations which project into the world a sense of aim, unity, and structure. Under this epistemic position the only truths available are “man’s truths” which, for Nietzsche, serve the pragmatic function of ensuring the survival of the species (see, for instance, WP: 507). Thus, Nietzsche rejects our drive towards metaphysical truths on the grounds that we do not have access to such truths.³

Second, Nietzsche critiques the will to (metaphysical) truth as a psychological self-delusion; rather than a drive towards uncovering truths, such a will is a drive towards making all

³ I find it interesting to note that Nietzsche’s epistemology is naturalistic and similar to W.V.O. Quine’s conception of knowledge. While I will not explore their similarities here, I believe such a comparison could be informative in analyzing Nietzsche’s perspectivism further.

things “thinkable.” Rather than agree that there are such metaphysical or religious truths to be discovered rationally, he suggests that these truths are myths that we have created—it is the same psychological need that leads to the creation of metaphysical and religious myths that underlies the need for absolute, transcendent truth. This is a direct attack against western epistemology in that it denotes what is perceived as a pure rational faculty of willing to be nothing more than a psychological coping mechanism. Terrified of the chaotic world of becoming, humanity injects within the world its ‘anthropomorphisms’, and as Nietzsche argues, “reinterprets the exceedingly derivative, late, rare, accidental, [as] something essential, universal, and eternal” (GS: 109). ‘Will to truth,’ therefore, should not be understood as a ‘will to absolute truth;’ rather it should be understood as a “will to the thinkability of all [things]” (TZ: 12).

By inventing a world of being, we can attribute rationality to the world of becoming, and employ rationality upon it. However, although this may ease the terrors of existence and allow humanity to subsist, it does not justify or support any claim to a metaphysical or religious theory of ‘Truth.’ Perhaps this is why, in his unpublished essay entitled *On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche refers to ‘Truths’ as “illusions we’ve forgotten are illusions!” (TL, 42-47). At bottom, humanity has confused its pursuit towards self-preservation with its pursuit of truth.

Finally, Nietzsche regards the will to truth as inadequate for properly explaining the human condition. To make all things “thinkable” is a drive inherent in the nature of human beings, but this is not our whole will, you who are “wisest,” but rather “will to power” (TZ: 12). For Nietzsche, the drive toward metaphysical and religious truth is pursued not for truth itself, but rather for power. Humanity pursues ‘Truth’ in hope to understand and become master over nature, and this is nothing more than the pursuit of ‘Truth’ out of a desire for the expansion of

power. Nietzsche describes the theologians and metaphysicians of the ages as such: “Their ‘knowing’ is creating, their creating is legislation, their will to truth is—will to power” (BGE: 211). What Nietzsche means by this has already been discussed above. One simply forgets that ‘Truth’ is an illusion and feels a tremendous increase in strength over the environment when one posits an explanation, albeit an illusory explanation, of that environment.

To hold the ‘Truth’ gives one a sense of power not only over the inanimate, but also over the animate, and resultantly humanity elevates itself over all other things as the highest ranking of all sentient life. Even within the species, to possess truth beyond the common truths of man is to achieve an elevated sense of power over other men. Thus, Nietzsche argues, “Those who feel ‘I possess Truth’— how many possessions would they not abandon in order to save this feeling! What would they not throw overboard to stay ‘on top’, – which means, *above* the others who lack ‘the Truth!’” (GS: 13).⁴ At bottom, Nietzsche takes a reductionist approach toward the scientist’s, theologian’s, and metaphysician’s drive towards absolute truth. Since such truths are artistically created to relate human experience to a metaphysical world, they rest only on assumptions and prejudices. Resultantly, Nietzsche argues that this drive towards attaining the truth fails to stem from some pure, detached, rational drive; instead, the will to truth is a manifestation of ‘will to power.’⁵

⁴ Perhaps this is why the theologians and metaphysicians of the ages doubted all but their foundations and assumed the absolute, transcendent ‘Truth’ as rationally attainable. The tremendous waste of strength required to fabricate a world that justified these ‘Truths’ was nothing more than a final battle to once and for all secure an elevated feeling of power.

⁵ It is worth noting that Nietzsche also takes a reductionist approach to another kind of will: Arthur Schopenhauer’s *will to live*. Briefly, Schopenhauer recognizes the human condition as ‘will-to-live,’ which can be rendered as a drive to preserve human existence. However, under Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy which characterizes the essence of life as suffering, this will is absurdly an aimless impulse. Schopenhauer recommends renouncing one’s ‘will-to-live’ to help mitigate the intensity of this suffering. By denying one’s ‘will-to-live,’—which includes a renunciation of all desires—one transforms the will-to-live to a will towards nothingness. Nietzsche views Schopenhauer’s pessimism as a form of passive nihilism, denying both extrinsic and intrinsic value to human existence. Ultimately, Nietzsche rejects the will to live, arguing “that will does not exist.” First, logically, the ‘will-to-live’ is nonsensical “[f]or what does not exist cannot will.” Second, if a being is alive, it is equally

II: Will to Power as Metaphysics

Following Nietzsche's reduction of the "will to truth" to a unifying will to power, one popular interpretation asserts the will to power to be a foundational and unifying claim about the nature of reality. I call this view, *the metaphysical interpretation*. In the sections which follow, I will explain this interpretation and then offer reasons why this reading of will to power fails to explain the concept in light of Nietzsche's broader philosophy.

Section 1: The Metaphysical Interpretation

The metaphysical interpretation is built primarily from Nietzsche's posthumous publications: both *The Will to Power* and his collection of notes known as the *Nachlass*.⁶ It is throughout these works that Nietzsche makes sweeping metaphysical claims about the nature of reality. For instance, we find "Life is will to power" (WP: 254) and, "the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every center of force — not self-preservation, but the will to appropriate, dominate, increase, grow stronger." (WP: 689).⁷ Perhaps Nietzsche's most definitive account of the world as will to power was written in 1885, just four years before the end of Nietzsche's creative life:

And do you know what 'the world' is to me? Shall I show you it in my mirror? This world: a monster of force, without beginning, without end, a fixed, iron quantity of force which grown neither larger nor smaller, which doesn't exhaust but only transforms itself, as a whole unchanging in size, an economy without expenditure and losses, but equally

absurd to consider "what is in existence" to "still want existence" (T: 12). Instead, Nietzsche holds that what is alive aspires beyond the fundamental needs of self-preservation and instead towards acquiring power. In short, Nietzsche reduces the will to live to will to power.

⁶ The *Nachlass*, which includes *The Will to Power*, is most heavily utilized as textual support for Nietzsche's 'will to power' as a metaphysical or cosmological principle.

⁷ Likewise, he suggests that the will to power is also an evaluative concept: "[T]here is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power — assuming that life itself is the will to power" (WP 55); and "What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power" (WP 674). Such passages connote that Nietzsche viewed all reality as made up of a variety of "force centers," with each center of force constantly striving to expand their power over another.

without increase....– *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves too are this will to power – and nothing besides! (WP: 1067)

Here, Nietzsche presents what appears to be a metaphysical speculation about the nature of reality. For Nietzsche, nature itself is a “monster of force,” or power, which is not infinite, but rather spatially finite. Nowhere in this universe is there empty space, but everywhere centers of power, constantly competing to sublimate and expand their power over one another (see also, WP: 55 and 674). Time itself, perceived as circular and eternally repeating. This world viewed as “eternally self-creating, eternally self-destroying,” eternally recurring, with its creative and destructive tendencies resting fundamentally on nothing other than a will to power. Thus, comes the ultimate reduction; “*This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!*”

Martin Heidegger is the first scholar to introduce the metaphysical interpretation of will to power. Building from Nietzsche’s unpublished notes (especially WP: 1067), he argues, “Nietzsche’s philosophy proper, the fundamental position on the basis of which he speaks in these and in all the writings he himself published, did not assume a final form and was not itself published in any book... What Nietzsche himself published during his creative life was always foreground” (Heidegger 1961, 9). As Heidegger views it, “[t]he expression ‘will to power’ designates the basic character of beings; any being which is, insofar as it is, is will to power” (18). Thus, for Heidegger, the ‘will to power’ marks the fundamental nature of beings as becoming, as it explains the constant flux and chaotic struggle that is existence.⁸

⁸ Furthermore, Heidegger views this notion as inseparable from Nietzsche’s doctrine of *the eternal recurrence*. Heidegger argues, will to power explains the basic character of being, whereas the eternal recurrence explains what being is: “What is will to power itself, and how is it... the eternal recurrence of the same” (1961, 19). Heidegger’s position is better clarified in WP 1067 above. Here, Nietzsche expresses what he views the world as, an eternal force of energy, consistently transforming itself. What characterizes a center of force is its ability to constantly sublimate/transform its function, whereas what defines the universe is the eternal recurrence of the same. Holding

Likewise, the metaphysical interpretation finds further evidence through other passages indicating a sort of metaphysical reductionism. For instance, Nietzsche argues “[a]ll events that result from intention are reducible to the intention to increase power” (WP: 663). Likewise: “[o]ur intellect, our will, likewise our feelings are [all] dependent on our *valuations*: these correspond to our drives and the conditions of their existence. Our drives can be reduced to the *will to power*” (LN: 40[61]). Nietzsche suggests here that all aim driven behaviors, whether conscious or unconscious, are reducible to an expression or manifestation of will to power. Here, will to power serves as a unifying principle behind all organic and inorganic beings and their functions. As Nietzsche views it:

It is the will to power that guides the inorganic world as well... ‘Action at a distance’ cannot be eliminated: *something draws something else closer, something feels drawn.*

This is the fundamental fact: compared to this, the mechanistic notion of pressing and pushing is merely a hypothesis based on *sight* and *touch*, even if it does indeed serve us as a regulative hypothesis for the world of sight. (LN: 34[247])

Nietzsche thus proposes replacing a mechanistic understanding of the world with the world understood as will to power. By eliminating superficial layers of experience, we find that nothing remains “but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension between all other dynamic quanta... The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a pathos—the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge” (WP: 635).

‘will to power’ in this way, Heidegger is able to provide a metaphysical basis for his own philosophy put forward in *Being and Time*.

More recently, scholars have focused on a cluster of terms Nietzsche associates with will to power—"power quanta" (WP: 296; 339; 368; 633; 715), power "centers" (WP: 412; 549; 715, "force" (WP: 549; 567; 688)—to support the metaphysical interpretation. Nietzsche equates 'force' and other mechanistic functions with will to power—referring to them as 'power quanta' or 'power centers.' By doing so, he redefines the causal interactions that occur in nature in terms of will to power (see, for e.g., WP: 633). As Richard Schacht explains, the "processes" that result from these interactions are "held to 'go on' throughout the whole of reality;" however, "this does not mean that the world constitutes a unity or system" (Schacht 1995, 209). That is, these relationships are in constant flux, and if we lack any transcendent governance of such relationships or objective laws, like those imposed on us in a mechanistic or scientific worldview, then the world lacks any claim to order and unity. Rather, the world is the "totality of such dynamic quanta or fields of force, in a condition of internal tension and instability," and the relationships that are formed through such interactions (208). Meanwhile, John Richardson, suggests that 'power quanta' or 'power centers' are end directed. This "teleological interpretation" of the will to power treats the will to power as a categorical concept, which can be further subdivided into "units of will to power" which are "deeply diverse in their types", demarcated by the "their distinctive efforts and tendencies" towards their "internal ends." Thus, for Richardson a drive does not actively seek power as an end, but rather power is what pushes a drive to achieve and continuously sublimate its function or "internal end." Under this interpretation, a drive wills power inasmuch as it wills the "full achievement" of its internal end, "at the expense...of all competing drives" (Richardson 1996, 24).

Finally, in addition to Nietzsche's unpublished works, advocates of the metaphysical interpretation turn to aphorism 36 in *Beyond Good and Evil* as further evidence that Nietzsche offers will to power as a metaphysical doctrine:

If we assume that nothing is "given" as real other than our world of desires and passions and that we cannot access from above or below any "reality" other than the direct reality of our drives... In the end the question is whether we acknowledge the will as something really efficient, whether we believe in the causal properties of the will. If we do...then we must make the attempt to set up hypothetically the causality of the will as the single causality....Suppose finally that we were to succeed in explaining our entire instinctual life as a development and branching off of a single fundamental form of the will - that is, of the will to power, as my principle asserts - and suppose we could trace back all organic functions to this will to power...then in so doing we would have earned the right to designate all efficient force unambiguously as will to power. Seen from inside, the world defined and described according to its "intelligible character" would be simply "will to power" and nothing else. (BGE: 36)

Like WP: 1067, this aphorism encapsulates the metaphysical interpretation. Nietzsche develops a metaphysical hypothesis about the nature of reality. Here, everything in the world is reduced to "a single fundamental form...of the will to power". At bottom, this seems to suggest that the will to power becomes an explanatory tool for the "intelligible character" to understand the world. Yet, this is the only published aphorism in which the will is expressed in these terms.

Section 2: Objections

Although a metaphysical interpretation of the will to power finds adequate support in some of Nietzsche's writings, I argue that this interpretation is problematic for at least four reasons. First, the metaphysical interpretation of will to power is logically inconsistent with Nietzsche's position towards metaphysical speculation. Nietzsche notably refers to himself as an anti-metaphysician (GS: 344) and devotes many of his works to polemics against metaphysical philosophies, arguing that they are dangerous forms of dogmatism (see, for example, BGE: preface and chapter 1). Here, Nietzsche charges that all of metaphysics is nothing other than the 'prejudices of philosophers,' and cannot be justified on any scientific, or transcendent foundations.⁹ To approbate Nietzsche's will to power as a metaphysical doctrine would thus be inconsistent with Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical stance. Similarly, following our earlier analysis of truth, Nietzsche distinguishes between metaphysical truths and man's truths. Recall that Nietzsche is very critical of metaphysical truth, viewing it as unattainable, or at best inaccessible. His view of metaphysical truth is straightforward—such truths are “illusions we've forgotten are illusions!” (TL: 42-47). Given Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical stance and the rejection of the truths it espouses it would be erroneous to interpret his doctrine of will to power as metaphysically true.

Second, similar to Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical position, the metaphysical interpretation is inconsistent with Nietzsche's epistemic position of perspectivism. Nietzsche suggests that all metaphysical theories are “provisional perspectives,” and thus not objectively true (BGE: 2). So, given perspectivism, if Nietzsche meant the will to power to be a general account of the nature of reality then it cannot be taken as objectively true; rather it is only true under a given perspective,

⁹ Hence the title of the first section of *Beyond Good and Evil: On the Prejudices of Philosophers*.

namely the Nietzschean perspective. But, to strip from metaphysics any claims of objectivity is to expunge it altogether. Therefore, given Nietzsche's attacks against western metaphysics and his dismantling of traditional epistemology it would be contradictory to attempt to offer a general account of the nature of reality since any competing account would be just as valid. This cannot be his intention; otherwise it would not make sense as to why he would waste such a tremendous amount of strength undermining western epistemic and metaphysical foundations.

Attempts have been made to navigate around such objections. Schacht, for example, argues that Nietzsche's criticisms of metaphysics are directed solely on classical conceptions and cannot be extrapolated to include the whole area of discourse generally (Schacht 1995, 168-169). But I agree with Maudemarie Clark, as she suggests this response tries to navigate around the problem by arguing classical metaphysics makes claims regarding "true" or "other worlds," whereas the doctrine of will to power makes claims pertaining to "this world" (Clark 1990, 206). As she points out, however, this move is also inconsistent with Nietzsche's notion of truth. She argues, a distinction cannot be made between 'this world' and the 'true world' "except in terms of the distinction between empirical and *a-priori* knowledge" (206). Nietzsche's epistemic position clearly delineates between empirical and *a-priori* knowledge, accepting the former, but rejecting the latter. This distinction has already been made above between metaphysical truths and 'man's truths.' We are not entitled to *a-priori* truths since we lack any access to a reality independent of human experience. Furthermore, we lack access to any *a-priori* truths if we take seriously, as we should, Nietzsche's perspectivism, as it is the nature of *a-priori* truths to hold objectively.

A third problem with the metaphysical interpretation is an exegetical issue. Specifically, there is a lack of textual support available throughout Nietzsche's published works for this

reading of will to power. Instead, as suggested above, this interpretation relies heavily upon Nietzsche's unpublished materials. Perhaps the most severe case arises with Heidegger who argues that "Nietzsche's philosophy proper...did not assume a final form and was not itself published in any book...what Nietzsche himself published during his creative life was always foreground" (Heidegger 1961, 8-9). Heidegger largely dismisses the material Nietzsche approved for publication, whereas other thinkers supplement the *Nachlass* to better grapple with the ideas presented in the published writings. In his essay, "The Use and Abuse of The Will to Power," Bernd Magnus classifies this group of interpreters as "lumpers" (Magnus 1986, 218-235). Lumpers face the exegetical problem of why one should emphasize Nietzsche's unpublished notes over his published aphorisms on will to power. Such a priority entails the question as to why Nietzsche never chose to publish the *Nachlass* notes. While Nietzsche acknowledges a plan to write a work under the title "*The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*" (GM III:27), this project never materialized. Meanwhile, there is evidence to suggest that the posthumously published *The Will to Power* is not what Nietzsche had in mind for the project.¹⁰ Therefore, "lumpers" such as Heidegger, Schacht, and Richardson, ground their essentialist understanding of Nietzsche wholly on a misunderstanding.

¹⁰ *The Will to Power* consists of 1,067 unpolished fragments from Nietzsche's notebooks compiled posthumously by his sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche (and later reconstructed by Walter Kaufmann). Bernd Magnus argues that the Colli-Montinari edition of Nietzsche's *Nachlass* sheds light on the problems associated with this posthumous work. According to Magnus, the chronological order of the some 8,000 pages provided under the Colli-Montinari edition, make it explicit that Nietzsche had abandoned the *The Will to Power* entirely, and more importantly that if such a work was to be finished it was not to be "the pseudo-canonical 1,067 sections gathered under that title" (Magnus, 223). Here Magnus points out that Nietzsche had changed the outline several times. The most notable change occurs from 1887 to 1888. The 1887 outline of Book III consisted of four sections: "The Will to Power as Knowledge;" "The Will to Power in Nature;" "The Will to Power in Society;" "The Will to Power as Art" (Magnus, 225). The outline produced in 1888 for Book III is wholly different: "The Will to Truth;" "Morality as Circe of Philosophers;" "Psychology of the Will to Power" (Magnus, 225). The Förster-Nietzsche edition of *The Will to Power* we have today is not based off of this latter outline and for that reason cannot be sufficiently regarded as Nietzsche's final verdict or philosophy proper.

A fourth problem concerns the only published aphorism the metaphysical interpretation relies upon, BGE: 36 (presented above). While some scholars refer to this passage as supporting the idea that Nietzsche intends the will to power to be a metaphysical doctrine, there are some issues with this interpretation. Given that Nietzsche's other published aphorisms of the will to power do not suggest a metaphysical connotation, it is difficult that Nietzsche would rest an entire metaphysics on one published aphorism. This is all the more suspect given that, throughout Nietzsche's published works, there are a number of other aphorisms concerning the will to power that do not support the metaphysical interpretation—most discuss the will in seemingly psychological terms. Furthermore, the aphorism itself appears to not offer a definitive claim, but an experimental one. Notice that the aphorism utilizes three hypothetical propositions (expressed by "If", "If-then", and "Suppose-then"). Such hypothetical formulations suggest that Nietzsche himself was not convinced that the world was fundamentally reducible to will to power. Akin to this point, Linda Williams argues that Nietzsche's conclusion that the "intelligible character" of the world is will to power is not a definitive conclusion, but rather "the end of a string of hypothetical possibilities" (Williams 2001, 455). Nietzsche's hesitancy to remove "suppose" from later edited editions supports the view that he had no intention of advancing a metaphysical theory of will to power in his published writings. For this reason, it is hard to hold Nietzsche's unpublished works as evidence of the will to power as a metaphysical, cosmological, or ontological doctrine. Thus, given these four problems, we have strong evidence to reject the metaphysical interpretation.

III: Will to Power as Metaphor

Having canvassed the will to power under a metaphysical interpretation, and resultantly having refuted that interpretation, it is important that we now move towards an analysis of another popular interpretation of the will to power, what I call the *metaphorical interpretation*.

Section 1: The Metaphorical Interpretation

Following Wayne Klein, the metaphorical interpretation maintains that “[t]he will to power does not name the essence of nature, but is one way among others of describing nature, a form of description that Nietzsche recognizes as explicitly metaphorical” (Klein 1997, 156). To better understand the basis for this interpretation, it is essential that we acquaint ourselves with Nietzsche’s views regarding science, perspectivism, and art.

Given Nietzsche’s philosophical skepticism and anti-metaphysical position, it is perhaps no surprise that Nietzsche viewed 19th century mechanistic science with great disdain. In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche argues that 19th century science is the “*most stupid*” of all interpretations of the world, in that it reduces the world to purely mechanical functions, which makes the world “essentially *meaningless*” (GS: 373). Perhaps more importantly, Nietzsche claims that science is itself nothing other than interpretation—it does not offer an ontological account of nature . This same reduction is made in greater scope in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here, Nietzsche responds to the physicists’ belief in “nature’s conformity to law.” As Nietzsche views it, such a belief is grounded not in objective foundations, but rather, subjective prejudices: “It is no matter of fact, no ‘text,’ but [only] a naively humanitarian emendation and perversion of meaning” (BGE: 22). This connotes that there is no objective explanation for reality, but rather, only descriptions or interpretations of reality. Or, as Nietzsche puts it, “I would say: No facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact ‘in itself’: perhaps

it is folly to do such a thing” (WP: 481). Such a view is in accordance with Nietzsche’s epistemic perspectivism, which as we recall, maintains that “all evaluation is made from a definite perspective,” so that nothing is objectively determined, but is rather a projection of structure and order, which describe, or interpret empirical experiences (WP: 259). Thus, there is no one proper interpretation of the world but a variety of interpretations, where the justification of each interpretation is perspective dependent.

This emphasis on interpretation places Nietzsche in a position to present his own interpretation of the world. As he argues, “somebody might come along who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same ‘nature,’ and with regard to the same phenomena, rather the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of claims of power” (BGE: 22). Once again, this interpretation would not designate facts that obtain in a metaphysically transcendent world; rather it would serve as a description of the world of experience through a particular perspectival seeing. In this regard, some scholars have interpreted Nietzsche’s will to power as metaphorical in that it, too, is an interpretation, or artistic creation. For instance, Klein maintains that, given Nietzsche’s perspectivism, “the same set of phenomena is open to a multiplicity of diverse, even mutually exclusive interpretations” (Klein 1997, 156). The will to power is therefore not the fundamental basis and explanation of all reality, but rather one interpretation, amongst many, that attempts to account for the empirical experiences we encounter in everyday life.

Further support of the will to power as a metaphorical doctrine can be found in Nietzsche’s account of art. Nietzsche argues that “the existence of the world is only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon” (BT: 5). The word “only” is of major importance here as it once again suggests that Nietzsche rejects essentialist positions that view the phenomenon of the world as

objectively explainable. Instead, Nietzsche argues that only through artistic creation can humanity posit *intrinsic value* into the world. This passage also shows the connection between Nietzsche's perspectivism and his account of art. Each perspective is unique in that it is artistically constructed by an individual observer. Although, some perspectives may merge and share common ground among one another, each can only be understood through the eyes of the individual artist or observer. Take for example Beethoven's ninth symphony. We can all rejoice in this prestigious display of musical talent. However, we may each interpret the piece differently, attributing to it a certain meaning and status which cannot be entirely understood by others of the same listening group. Similarly, Nietzsche's perspectivism suggests that, at bottom, we construct the world through background theories, whether they're religious, philosophical, or scientific in nature. Such constructions demonstrate our own unique artistic impulses, as we actively interpret our experiences.

For Nietzsche, this artistic impulse plays a central role in the development of prominent world interpretations. As discussed in chapter one, Nietzsche treats God as an illusion—an artistic creation imposed upon the world to inject a sense of structure, purpose, and unity to human existence. Like the scientific worldview, this religious ideal is one interpretation among many that attempts to describe the world. The problem Nietzsche points out, however, is that adherents to these worldviews begin to believe in themselves, holding their interpretation to be “the” interpretation in which all other interpretation will be judged (BGE: 9). In this sense, these interpretations begin to hold what is merely illusion to be fact, and for Nietzsche this misconception is life negating. Hence, Nietzsche regards the truths espoused under the God hypothesis to be dangerous to life and argues that we should ultimately reject this interpretation. The same rejection is taking place above regarding science. Rather than cling to a dogmatic

picture of science, Nietzsche recommends a gay, or joyful, scientific approach that is experimental and open-ended. To do so, Nietzsche suggests we go back to the drawing board and reconstruct a worldview that offers *intrinsic value* and affirms this life. The picture that Nietzsche paints is will to power. Will to power is thus not only an artistic interpretation, illusion, or useful fiction, similar to the scientific or religious theories criticized above; it is also a central metaphor that formulates part of Nietzsche's philosophical response to the death of God. Recalling the parable of *The Madman*, Nietzsche writes, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him...How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers...? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent" (GS: 125)? For Nietzsche, this "festival of atonement," this "sacred game" that we must invent is will to power. The will to power becomes part of Nietzsche's perspective that helps to formulate his *active nihilism*, whereby one can affirm life in a godless world.

If treated metaphorically, the will to power can be understood in a variety of ways. First, the will to power can be understood as an existential imperative which promotes human overcoming and life affirmation. In this way, the will to power could easily be associated with Nietzsche's notion of active nihilism, the eternal recurrence, and the *Übermensch*. Next, the will to power could be offered as another description, among many, of the way in which the world operates. This is the view most closely associated with Klein above. Interestingly, however, if treated metaphorically, the will to power can be understood under either reading and still be justified under that given perspective. It is unclear, which reading Nietzsche himself would support, but the texts suggest evidence for both treatments.

Section 2: Objections

Although a metaphorical reading of the will to power is compatible with Nietzsche's epistemic perspectivism, active nihilism, and the overman, we still find adequate reason to reject it as the preferred account. There are two central reasons underlying this rejection. First, the metaphorical interpretation lacks textual support throughout Nietzsche's writings. Earlier in this chapter, we criticized the metaphysical interpretation for relying too heavily on Nietzsche's unpublished material. We find a similar, although more acute problem with the metaphorical interpretation of the will to power. Here, the interpretation is hindered by the fact that Nietzsche offers little to no published or unpublished aphorisms that directly connect will to power to an illusion or a metaphorical idea about reality. In fact, only one aphorism is frequently cited as textual evidence: BGE: 22. Klein takes this aphorism as definitive for understanding the will to power, suggesting that the hypothetical propositions suggest a metaphorical or fictional presentation of the concept. However, not only is this aphorism inconclusive with its treatment of the will to power, we find no further support for a metaphorical interpretation in the other detailed discussions of the will to power throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*.¹¹ With this lack of textual support, the metaphorical interpretation relies on an inference to the best explanation. Given Nietzsche's account of science, perspectivism, and art, one infers that the will to power is best understood metaphorically. However, a similar inference can be formulated to reject this position. Given the fact that Nietzsche fails to discuss the will to power explicitly as a metaphorical notion, and that resultantly we lack sufficient evidence for supporting such an interpretation, we can infer that a metaphorical reading is incorrect. Once again, we cannot use a single aphorism as adequate support for one of Nietzsche's most central philosophical positions.

¹¹ The Will to Power is discussed at length in BGE: 9, BGE: 23, and BGE: 36.

Second, the metaphorical interpretation misinterprets Nietzsche's account of the artist and art. A note, which retroactively reflects upon *The Birth of Tragedy*, expresses clearly Nietzsche's mature thoughts on art and its connection with the will to power.

Metaphysics, morality, religion, science—in this book these things merit consideration only as various forms of lies: with their help one can have faith in life. 'Life *ought* to inspire confidence': the task thus imposed is tremendous. To solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an *artist*. And he *is* one: metaphysics, religion, morality, science—all of them only products of his will to art...In those moments in which man was deceived, in which he duped himself, in which he believes in life: oh how enraptured he feels! What delight! What a feeling of power!— Man has once again become master of '*material*'—master of truth!— And whenever man rejoices, he is always the same in his rejoicing: he rejoices as an artist, he enjoys himself as power, he enjoys the lie as his form of power. (WP: 853)

This passage suggests that Nietzsche views the will to power not as a work of art, or as a perspectival description of reality, but rather as a fundamental human drive.¹² For Nietzsche, metaphysics, morality, religion and science are all expressions of a will to art, which as Nietzsche argues is merely a manifestation of the will to power. As such, the will to power is the source for the aesthetic phenomena that aim to justify life, whether that is God, metaphysics, religion, or tragedy, in the case of the Greeks. This claim is to be understood as empirical in

¹² To be clear, if this was the only passage to counter the metaphorical interpretation, my argument would be tenuous—similar to the metaphysical interpretation, my case would rely solely on Nietzsche's unpublished writings. But there are other (published) aphorisms suggesting that the will to power is a human drive. I will introduce them in the next chapter.

nature. For Nietzsche, each perspective shares the commonality of its thirst for power, for after all “a living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength” (BGE: 13). At bottom, each perspective is a different expression or manifestation of will to power. Here we can have an objective basis for a perspectival theory of knowledge which safeguards Nietzsche’s position from a devastating contradiction.

For these reasons it is plausible that the will to power serves a more robust role in Nietzsche’s philosophy than as an illusory concept similar to those which he so often argues against. Instead, will to power could be fundamental to understanding the human condition generally, being utilized as an explanatory tool for all human drives and behaviors.

Chapter 3: The Psychological Interpretation of Will to Power

In the previous chapter, I presented two possible interpretations of will to power—metaphysical and metaphorical. I offered reasons for rejecting these positions as I viewed them as inadequate representations of Nietzsche’s will. In the following sections, I will present what I take to be a far more robust interpretation of the will to power—the psychological interpretation. I argue that this interpretation is most fitting with Nietzsche’s published works. Further, it is the interpretation which allows for a more systematic reading of Nietzsche’s philosophy. To develop this position, the first section will consist of a presentation of Nietzsche’s uses of power throughout his early and late works, uses which I will argue eventually develop into Nietzsche’s mature theory of will to power. In the sections which follow, I will present my theory of will to power as a first-order monistic psychology which makes up the constitution of Nietzsche’s perspective.

I: Psychology of Power

It is no surprise at this point that Nietzsche took a very cautionary approach towards philosophy and science. He regarded the traditional philosophical approach as flawed, coming to view philosophy as “the impersonal confession of its author” (BGE: 6). Nietzsche’s removal of God and his critiques of epistemology and metaphysics resulted from his adoption of a form of naturalism in philosophy—spreading the seed through which post-modernism would grow. Of the sciences, Nietzsche was especially fond of psychology. In fact, he goes so far as to argue that “psychology shall be recognized again as the queen of the sciences” (BGE: 23). Yet even here, we cannot mistake Nietzsche for saying that science could aid philosophy in its quest for truth; science was again only one interpretation among others (BGE: 22). Nietzsche, however, was not concerned with truth as such, but rather, the human, all too human—man’s truths. In the

following pages I will attempt to illuminate this development of Nietzsche's thought as it pertains to his development of will to power.

As early as *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche appears to be experimenting with a theory of human psychology, arguing "That reflection on the human, all too human—or... psychological observation—is among the expedients by means of which one can alleviate the burden of living" (HH: 35). In the subsequent aphorisms, Nietzsche attempts to describe various human emotions and feelings in seemingly psychological terms. On gratitude he says, "The reason the man of power is grateful is this. His benefactor has, through the help he has given him...laid hands on the sphere of the man of power and intruded into it: now, by way of requital, the man in power in turn lays hands on the sphere of his benefactor through the act of gratitude. It is a milder form of revenge" (HH: 44). And on pity, "The thirst for pity [is] a thirst for self-enjoyment...at the expense of one's fellow men" (HH: 50).

This psychological experimentation continues into Nietzsche's later writings as well. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche argues that "Benefitting and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power upon others...One hurts those whom one wants to feel one's power...we benefit and show benevolence to those who are already dependent on us in some way; we want to increase their power because in that way we increase ours" (GS: 13). By assisting those in need we create a dependence which I turn heightens our sense of power. Likewise, by hurting others we increase our feeling of power over them. Here, we may belittle one to appear intellectually superior, or worse yet, we may physically hurt one to assert dominance. In each case, a heightened feeling of power results. Nietzsche is quick to point out, however, that the latter is far less agreeable than the former, and argues, that the desire to hurt others' springs from weakness, or lack of power—it "shows a sense of frustration in the face of this poverty" (GS: 13).

It also appears that Nietzsche's reduction of the will to truth as presented in chapter two, is best interpreted in psychological terms.¹³ In each case, Nietzsche asks why man confides himself in such an expression of the will. I suggest that Nietzsche attempts to look at each alternative conception of the will psychoanalytically. "*What* in us really wants 'truth'?" (BG: 1). For Nietzsche, this will towards truth would best be understood as a psychological question—for Nietzsche's interest seems to rest fundamentally in the genealogy of the expression of this will, i.e., tracing the origins from which it was created.

I hold that Nietzsche traces and locates the origin of these wills as fundamentally psychological expressions of will to power. As my above analysis of Nietzsche's reductionism indicates, the will to truth is driven by the urge to have power over reality, to know the nature of things. Such is explicated quite well when in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche asks,

Will to Truth'...A will to the thinkability of all beings...You want to make all being thinkable, for you doubt with well-founded suspicion that it is already thinkable. But it shall yield and bend for you. Thus your will wants it...That is your whole will, you who are wisest: a will to power. (TZ: 12)

Here, it is made clear that in one way or another an increase in power is achieved through making certain phenomena thinkable. For the priests, 'Truth' is regarded as a given component of their faith—God is placed above nature as the measure of all things. Likewise, philosophers fight attentively to ground their doctrines in absolute rational principles.¹⁴ And, science has long sought to explain the natural phenomenon of the world mechanistically. In each case, the

¹³ I further contend that such a psychological reductionism applies to Nietzsche's analysis of other 'wills', such as will to art and Schopenhauer's will to live.

¹⁴ Refer to section: "Will to Truth as Will to Power" in Chapter One.

attainment of ‘Truth’ is followed by an elevated sense of power over oneself, others, and the environment. As Nietzsche explains, “How much one needs a faith in order to flourish, how much that is ‘firm’ and that one does not wish to be shaken because one *clings* to it, that is a measure of the degree of one’s strength (or to put it more clearly, of one’s weakness) (GS: 347). A will to power is the outlet through which such a faith expresses itself.¹⁵

Similar, Nietzsche suggests a psychological focus on the will to power with his first in-depth publication of the will to power, which occurs immediately after his reduction of will to truth in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Here, he unpacks the will to power as consisting of two psychological features: commanding and obeying:

But wherever I found the living, there I heard the speech on obedience: Whatever lives, obeys. And this is the second point: he who cannot obey himself is commanded. That is the nature of the living. This, however, is the third point that I heard: that commanding is harder than obeying Where I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master. (TZ: 12)

I contend that this in-depth introduction of the will to power is ultimately a psychological analysis of human beings, which is established by three fundamental observations of human

¹⁵ We can further analyze Nietzsche’s analysis of Schopenhauer’s will to live as a psychological reduction. Nietzsche criticized Schopenhauer’s postulation of the will to live, both in that the will is not fundamentally the will to live *and* that the fundamental will should not be construed in metaphysical terms. For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer fails to provide an adequate psychological analysis of the human condition. I suggest this shows that Nietzsche believes that human beings are driven, not by a psychological need to survive at a bare minimum, but rather, by a constant thriving—by a will to power. As he argues, “self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*” of one’s discharge of strength (BGE: 13). It appears that only such a reduction could be completed through psychological inquiry.

existence. First, “whatever lives, obeys.”¹⁶ At the very least, he is suggesting that, psychologically, all human beings “obey”—they either obey themselves or they obey someone else. Richardson refers to those who obey themselves as individuals with *active wills*: “a will that is not so tempted away from its own distinguishing activities and values.” The individual with an active will is leader, one who “keeps allegiance to itself and to the values favoring its own activity. It has an eye, indeed, for what's distinctive to itself, and a confidence in the worth of what it finds there. As such, it commands....” (Richardson 42). On the other hand, those who obey others are individuals with *reactive wills*, or a will that “obeys by being persuaded into willing and valuing foreign goals as superior to its (original) own” (Richardson 41). The second observation, “that he who cannot obey himself is commanded,” introduces commanding as the complementary psychological notion to obedience. As such, this could also be rephrased as “he who cannot command himself is commanded by another, or others.” Following Richardson’s distinction between active and reactive wills, the ‘reactive’ individual experiences a weakness of the will and is incapable of setting its own goals; rather it finds a more fitting position as a herd animal, as ‘commanded,’ rather than ‘commanding.’ The final observation, “that commanding is harder than obeying,” suggests the weight of responsibility the active will has, commanding both oneself and others. As Nietzsche puts it, the active will “must carry the burden of all who obey, and because this burden may easily crush him.... Indeed, even when it commands itself, it must still pay for its commanding. It must become the judge, the avenger, and the victim of its own law” (TZ: 12).¹⁷

¹⁶ As suggested from my argument against the metaphysical interpretation in chapter two, I suggest Nietzsche’s references to all living things is metaphorical or experimental.

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that Nietzsche’s emphasis on the weight of responsibility as a commander is influential to existentialism’s notions of freedom and responsibility. See, for instance, Jean Paul Sartre’s essay, “Existentialism and a Humanism.”

However, no work appears more decisive in presenting Nietzsche's experimental view of psychology than *Beyond Good and Evil*. In BGE: 23, Nietzsche argues, that "all psychology thus far has gotten stuck in moral prejudices and fears; it has not dared to descend into the depths" (BGE: 23). That is, psychology, like all science hitherto, has long fallen into the ancient dogmatic trap, painting a very narrow image of the human condition (BGE: 9). He advocates rather, for an experimental approach towards psychology, viewing it as essential if one is to uncover the "path to the fundamental problems" (BGE: 23). I will argue that it is Nietzsche's use of psychology as such that allows him to develop his theory of will to power in the first place. When Nietzsche argues, for example, that psychology is the "path to the fundamental problems" this seems to indicate that if done in a proper way psychology may liberate philosophers from the grips of dogmatism and all other negative philosophy. If Nietzsche had not held this view, I would find it strange that he went go as far as to conclude that psychology is to be conceived as "*the doctrine to the development of the will to power*" (BGE: 23). For it was application of psychology, and the genealogical questions he asked which allowed him to characterize the human condition as an expression in one way or another as will to power.

Several issues arise, however, for anyone who posits the psychological interpretation of will to power. The first is obvious, and it deals with how the will to power is to be characterized within Nietzsche's psychology. Is it, as Walter Kaufmann argues, a first-order drive, in which all other drives aim to satisfy? Or, is it, as Maudmarie Clark would have it, a second-order drive, aiming at the optimization of other first-order drives? Another issue I find pressing, is how to characterize Nietzsche's will to power within his epistemic perspectivism. Here, it is a matter of whether Nietzsche's will to power is a-perspectival, occupying a position outside of all perspectives, or perspectival, true relative to perspectives. The final problem I must attend to is

how does a psychological presentation of will to power account for the seemingly metaphysical and metaphorical presentations discussed in Nietzsche's published works—particularly BGE: 36.

II. First- vs Second-Order Drives

To begin, I argue that categorizing will to power as a second-order drive seems problematic. For one, Nietzsche almost always refers to will to power as an end, and never gives us adequate reason to treat will to power as a second rank philosophical concept. *Beyond Good and Evil* seems to be quite decisive on this point, particularly BGE: 6. Here, Nietzsche argues that if one were to examine the basic human drives they would discover that “every single one of them would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in *that spirit*” (BGE: 6). I believe this aphorism shows quite conclusively that Nietzsche regarded power as a motivational force behind all human drives. For one, Nietzsche is describing a prejudice he sees inherent in all philosophical thought, of which he includes himself as an agent. Hence, the drives Nietzsche finds most purposive are bound to be projected as *master*, and hence as ends in themselves. Power, then would be viewed under Nietzsche's philosophy as *master* over all other drives.

That said, treating the will to power as such does not commit Nietzsche to any ontological claims; it does not explain the constitution of all human psychology from outside of the Nietzschean perspective—this will be the focus of the following section. I agree with Kaufmann when he argues that will to power “might be the one and only interpretation of human behavior...when we consider the evidence and think of it as clearly as we can” (206).

Nietzsche's psychological hypothesis of the will to power is an inference to the best explanation,

grounded wholly in his experimental observations of human behavior—those he made from *Human, All Too Human* through *The Gay Science*.

Another reason I consider decisive in holding will to power as a first-order drive is Nietzsche's reductionist approach towards will to truth and will to live. Although he doesn't use this terminology, Nietzsche seems to reduce the philosophers will to truth and Schopenhauer's will to live to second-order wills or drives. On truth Nietzsche argues, "[t]hose who feel 'I possess truth'—how possessions would they not abandon in order to save this feeling," the feeling of power (GS: 13). Likewise, the will to life is only an "*exception...the great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power*" (GS: 349). Will to power is clearly placed as a motivating factor in each case. Nietzsche could not plausibly reduce will to truth and will to life as manifestations of will to power while arguing the latter is not a first-order will or drive.

However, one may pose the objection—as does Clark—that to characterize every motive as will to power, is to strip the "enlightening character" of any such explanations (Clark, 210). Resultantly, Clark would ask: "if all behavior is motivated by a desire for power...then the motive to rape has not been differentiated from any other motive" (210). Now, had Nietzsche not given us reason to believe some expressions of the will are good, others bad, then Clark would seem to have really found a hole in my reasoning. However, as I clarified in the previous section, Nietzsche argues "the state in which we hurt others is rarely as agreeable...as that in which we benefit others" (GS: 13). This argument is reinforced with Nietzsche's earlier discussions in the *Dawn*. Here, Nietzsche talks of hurting other explicitly in terms of a weakness: "the evil of weakness wants to do harm and see the signs of suffering it has caused" (D: 371). Thus, Nietzsche does seem to offer some criteria through which one drive can be distinguished from

another. A good expression of the will does not aim to hurt others, whereas a bad expression does. Rape, then, would be distinguishable from other forms of sexual intercourse.

Another objection posed by Clark is that will to power is not to be understood as power over the self—a position held by Kaufmann—but instead as “effectiveness in relation to the world, a sense of one’s ability to have the world satisfy one’s (first-order) will” (229). As support for her position, Clark argues that discussions of overcoming in aphorism 12 of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* are explicitly linked to the priest and holder of the ascetic ideal. For Clark, the “priests and philosophers connected the will to power to self-overcoming, diverting it away from more obvious ways of acquiring a sense of power” (229). However, this position is unlikely. Nietzsche refers to human beings generally in each of his two presentations of will to power in *Zarathustra*, and in both cases seemingly in terms of overcoming.

In section one aphorism 15, Zarathustra presents the moral codes of peoples as the tablets of their overcoming’s.

A tablet of good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcoming’s; behold, it is the voice of their will to power... Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil... they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed values in things to preserve himself—he alone created the meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he calls himself ‘man,’ which means: the esteemer. To esteem is to create... hear this you creators! Change of values—that is a change of creators. Whoever must be a creator always annihilates... Zarathustra saw many lands and many peoples. No greater power did Zarathustra find on earth than the works of the lovers: ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are their names. Verily, a monster is the power and censuring. Tell me, who will conquer it...? (TZ: I 15)

Certainly, Zarathustra is referring to the priest and ascetic as those “lovers” who created good and evil, but the aphorism does more work than this in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Zarathustra is

calling for others to overcome this creation, to smash it, and place above them another tablet of good. This cycle, along with Zarathustra's insights of 'commanding' and 'obeying,' seem to lead him to the conclusion that life is "*that which must always overcome itself...to something higher, farther, more manifold*" (TZ: 12). Effectiveness in the world would only be a byproduct of these overcoming's, not their main goal—power.

It appears then, that Nietzsche had not intended will to power to be read as a second-order drive, but rather an end and of first-order rank. This reading is in best relation with the works Nietzsche chose to publish, and wholly in accordance with the development of power throughout Nietzsche's early to late philosophy.

III. Perspectivism and Will to Power

Another issue that presents itself, is how to reconcile the psychological interpretation within Nietzsche's epistemic perspectivism. That is, either (a) will to power is a-perspectival, in which case, will to power is a foundational psychological concept that constitutes the source of the spectrum of perspectives; or (b) will to power is perspectival; it constitutes the Nietzschean perspective and is unique to that perspective. I contend the latter view to be correct—the will to power is best construed as Nietzsche's psychological hypothesis within a perspective. To justify this view, let us assume the former thesis first, that will to power is somehow independent of any one perspective. As such, the will to power characterizes the underlying psychological constitution of human beings, explaining how each perspective, from the religious perspective of Christianity to that of 19th century science, is an expression in one way or another of will to power. At the same time, recall Nietzsche's attack on traditional metaphysics and epistemology, as explained in chapter two. As such, such a generalization about human beings could not be grounded in any *a-priori* theorizing, but instead would depend on an inference made through his

experimental observations. Kaufmann adopts some proponent of this view in his work *Nietzsche*, in which he states, will to power is a “universal feature of the human condition, whose fictions must be considered necessary because they are not subjective” (Kaufmann 1950, 206). If this position is correct, it would not only broaden the scope through which Nietzsche applied his will, but also significantly broaden the scope of his perspectivism; will to power would not only be a truth of human psychology, but also act as a truth in support of Nietzsche’s perspectivism itself.¹⁸

It is seemingly plausible that Nietzsche adopted such a view. He characterizes philosophy as “the most spiritual will to power,” describes the priest and ascetic under this same will, and on several occasions deems “life itself [as] will to power” (BGE: 9,13). Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s writings provide several strong reasons to reject that he adopted an a-perspectival characterization of will to power. My immediate concern, is that if taken as an objective theory of psychology occupying a position outside of any given perspective, will to power would be inconsistent with Nietzsche’s epistemic perspectivism and anti-metaphysical views. It would, that is, attribute to the psychological hypothesis of will to power the same ontological goal that Nietzsche rejects in normal science. If we are to take Nietzsche criticism of science, metaphysics, and religion seriously—that theories and worldviews postulated in these fields are nothing more than interpretation and not fact—then we have sufficient reason to believe Nietzsche would not present will to power as an a-perspectival theory of the human condition (BGE: 22).

Further, to characterize will to power in objective terms would conflict with Nietzsche’s anti-foundationalist stance. Undoubtedly, Nietzsche was an anti-foundationalist thinker who

¹⁸ As such, will to power would characterize not one perspective—notably the Nietzschean perspective—instead, it would make up the constitution of all perspectives generally.

vehemently attacked any dogmatic discourse that began to “believe in itself” (BGE: 9). As an a-perspectival theory, will to power would be posited as a foundational concept which grounds all perspectives as an expression of this will. That is, will to power would become a central and foundational characteristic of perspectivism. It would justify perspectivism while being independent of it, and this is extremely problematic. This would be wholly at odds with the culmination of Nietzsche’s published works and should be rejected.

One may counter, arguing that an a-perspectival doctrine of will to power falls within the domain of ‘man’s truth,’ (to borrow Schacht’s terminology) and that it eludes the ontological critique Nietzsche imposed on science, metaphysics, and religion. Yet, I believe this would result from a misunderstanding of the nature of such truths. For Nietzsche, truth is to be viewed as “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people” (TL: 46-47). This seems to suggest that Nietzsche’s account of truth is perspective-dependent—it is inextricably associated with the perspective in which it operates and cannot provide any absolute status that transcends a given perspective. That is not to say, however, that a truth in one perspective cannot carry over into another through appropriation or acclimation but allows for more complex phenomena to be interpreted in drastically different terms. Hence, will to power can be held as true under Nietzsche’s perspective and viewed as objectively applicable as such, whereas other perspectives will offer wholly different interpretations of similar events. Otherwise, Nietzsche’s theory would be in clear violation of his epistemic perspectivism.

Resultantly, I argue that Nietzsche’s will to power is perspectival and constitutes the whole of the Nietzschean perspective. I view this position as being most consistent with

Nietzsche's published writings. First, it remains consistent with Nietzsche's epistemology. It does not subject the psychological interpretation of will to power to the ontological problem Nietzsche presents in normal science since it does not commit itself to any absolute objective claims—it does not “create the world in its own image” (BGE: 9). Second, a perspectival reading is consistent with Nietzsche's experimentalist approach towards philosophy and science. Nietzsche presents will to power as a hypothesis of human behavior, as description and not explanation, and acknowledges that his theory is open to re-evaluation and re-interpretation.

Another benefit of holding will to power as perspectival is that it best explains Nietzsche's seemingly metaphysical presentation of will to power found in BGE: 36. Again, we can closely link this usage with Nietzsche's experimental attitude towards philosophy and science. Kaufmann, for example, promotes the thesis that Nietzsche inferred from the basis of his psychology that perhaps everything was will to power (207). Meanwhile, Clarke treats Nietzsche's BGE: 36 as entirely metaphorical, as a construction of the world from the standpoint of Nietzsche's values (227). Following my arguments above, Nietzsche's theory could not be a-perspectival and hence cannot be the “constitution of the human mind” as Kaufmann would have it (207). It is implausible that Nietzsche would have even taken seriously any metaphysical speculation of the will to power and, if he had, he was extremely hesitant to publish it—hence why the metaphysical reading finds support primarily in the *Nachlass*. Hence, I treat BGE: 36 as an experimental use of metaphor. Nietzsche, having sketched a psychological account of the will to power from *Human, All Too Human* through *Zarathustra* must have wanted to push the idea to its limits and metaphorically apply it to all of reality. I believe then, that Clark was correct in her analysis of this aphorism as a construction of the world in terms of will to power.

IV. God is Dead and Nihilism

Unlike the metaphysical and metaphorical interpretations, I argue that a perspectival psychological interpretation of will to power is more consistent with Nietzsche's views towards religion and nihilism. For one, my position does not seem to suffer from the exegetical issues that each of the alternative positions face. Unlike the metaphysical interpretation, it does not rely solely on Nietzsche's unpublished notes. Unlike the metaphorical interpretation, it is not drawn from an underwhelming number of published aphorisms. Instead, the psychological interpretation can account for the presentations of will to power throughout the works approved for publication, while informing many of the more obscure passages present within the *Nachlass*. Further, this position offers the keenest insights into Nietzsche's position towards metaphysical speculation, while staying consistent with his ant-metaphysical and anti-foundationalist stance towards religion, philosophy, and science.

In chapter one, I argued that Nietzsche viewed God as a myth created by humanity in response to the horrors and terrors of existence¹⁹. This creation was seen by Nietzsche to be an expression of the will to art, which in the *Nachlass* is reduced to an expression of a more fundamental drive—will to power (WP: 853). In chapter two, I argued that the will to art is best understood as a psychological phenomenon, as opposed to metaphorical. This is an interpretation which finds support as early as *The Birth of Tragedy* as a means through which the Greeks give birth to their pantheon of gods (BT: 3). Above all, humanity seeks strength through the justification of their existence, and myths will be posited to achieve this goal or to hasten it. Hence, from the perspective of power, God is viewed as a myth posited to overcome humanity's

¹⁹ In HH:35, psychology is understood as the means through which humanity can respond to the burdens of living.

struggle with impermanence, and as a foundation for truth and morality, each of which increase an agent's feeling of power within the world.

This desire to create is not viewed from Nietzsche's psychology as unique to the religious perspective, but to all perspectives generally. What for Nietzsche constitutes a healthy perspective seems to be its effectiveness in responding to a variety of psychological needs; humanity lives for and needs a purpose or goal. The better a perspective responds to the psychological handicaps of a people, the more it condones their overcoming's, the healthier is its will to power from the standpoint of Nietzsche's perspective. Hence, Nietzsche's call for the *free spirits* to break from tradition and think for themselves and to *create* in their image.²⁰ In Christianity, Nietzsche saw a will to power that was sick, a will that had turned life and truth against itself and could no longer offer a way to cope with the psychological needs of its members. This psychological deprivation sparked the advent of a new age, an age Nietzsche found evocative of Schopenhauerian pessimism.

Hence, Nietzsche's acceptance of nihilism is best viewed from the pathology of psychology; it is a disease that arises given the disorder and chaos in the wake of the death of God. Indicative to this point is the bifurcation presented in chapter one, of nihilism in its negative and positive forms. Of the former, I discussed that Nietzsche classifies passive nihilism as "decline and recession of the power of the spirit," as a weak and retroactive condition under will to power (WP: 22). Of the latter, Nietzsche recognizes active nihilism as "a sign of increased power of the spirit," as a strong and healthy psychological condition under will to power (WP:

²⁰ I interpret Nietzsche's *free spirit* as the precursor to the *Übermensch*.

22). Nietzsche's favoring of the latter marks a reversion back to the Dionysian view and links will to power directly with his main philosophical goal of life affirmation.²¹

Furthermore, Nietzsche's analysis of active and passive nihilism as psychological responses to the (psychological) loss of God can be mapped onto the psychological interpretation of will to power. Recall that, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche characterizes the will to power as consisting of the psychological components of "commanding" and "obeying". Similar to Richardson's reactive will, we can imagine Nietzsche positing those who obey others as demonstrating passive wills. Such wills depict the passive nihilist, since they acknowledge nihilism after the death of God and resign themselves to accept the notion that they cannot change anything about this nihilistic predicament. Life is hopeless for the passive nihilist, given that demonstrate an obedience, or passive acceptance, to this nihilistic view. Meanwhile, we can imagine the commanders demonstrating active wills. They gain power through creating their own ideals, and by hanging their tablets over those who crave their power, which in turn increases their power. Just as Nietzsche favors active over passive nihilism, so too he favors commanding oneself over obeying others. He advances active nihilism as the psychological expression of the will as a to overcome the potential pessimistic conclusion that could follow from the death of God. Under this account, active nihilism is the option to direct oneself towards self-overcoming; towards the sublimation of the self towards some higher temporal goal. Here, Nietzsche envisions the *free spirit* as overcoming the self and becoming a symbol of strength, and as representing the affirmation of the *eternal return*.²² This individual, through their

²¹ Nietzsche uses the demigod, Dionysus, to metaphorically depict the idea that human existence is best characterized as a dynamic process of becoming (rather than a fixed state of being). Nietzsche develops this idea from *The Birth of Tragedy*, which culminates in his account of the overman as a Dionysian "frenzy" and "lightning" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

²² The *eternal return* is a central idea within Nietzsche's philosophy of active nihilism. In essence, it relates to the *free spirits* ability to accept their fate over and over again, or as the Latin term has it *amor Fati*. This marks the *free spirits* final litmus test and posits meaning in all past events.

psychological strength sublimates their will to power into its most powerful manifestation, replacing being with becoming, Apollo with Dionysus. At last, the tragic hero returns within Nietzsche's perspective as thundercloud and frenzy, as *Übermensch*.²³ Meanwhile, the passive nihilist waits in the face of nothingness for that which his will can obey.

Thus, the psychological interpretation of the will to power seems to not only explain various human behaviors such as benevolence and pity, it describes the human psychological condition under Nietzsche's perspective. From the creation of God, to the death of God, to the competing forms of nihilism that follows—Nietzsche suggests that all of these concepts appear to be psychological phenomenon that are evaluated in terms of power. Of course, Nietzsche does not offer us a theory of psychology as systematic as Sigmund Freud's or Alfred Adler's, but nevertheless he gives us a theory which is explicative of his philosophical goal of life affirmation, or of finding meaning in a Godless and seemingly meaningless world. In this sense, will to power becomes the perspective through which Nietzsche can make sense of this goal and combat the ailments of a tormented soul.

²³ It is rather obscure as to what Nietzsche exactly meant here. In English, *Übermensch* translates to superhuman. In the past this was misread as *Herrenvolk* which is German for master race. Yet, it is clear that Nietzsche did not adopt this reading and instead linked this his usage closely to that of overcoming. Hence, many scholars have adopted *overman* in order to best capture Nietzsche's meaning.

Conclusion

At the start of this thesis, I posed the question: what is will to power? I have shown the difficulties presented in addressing this difficult descriptive problem. In doing so, I presented three prominent interpretations of will to power: (a) the metaphysical interpretation; (b) the metaphorical interpretation; and (c) the psychological interpretation. I argued that both the metaphysical and metaphorical interpretations collapse when juxtaposed with Nietzsche's broader philosophy. Instead, I argued in favor of a psychological account of will to power. As I view it, this view is most consistent with Nietzsche's early and later writings and most explicative in terms of the death of God and nihilism in both its passive and active forms. It tells us, not only why humanity requires a God hypothesis, but why such a break with this hypothesis causes the psychological ills that it does, and it offers responses as such. Hence, it seems to illuminate best the direction in which Nietzsche's philosophy of overcoming aims.

Several implications arise as a result of this conclusion. First, this essay calls for a more detailed analysis of Nietzsche's *eternal return* and *Übermensch* in light of will to power as psychology. Second, another implication, one which was introduced in the opening section of this work, is the necessity of discussing the normative issue that appears to arise as a result of will to power. How does the psychological interpretation of will to power respond to the moral issues of immoralism, amoralism or moral chaos? This is certainly a question in need of a response. As of now, I contend that a Nietzschean moral theory does not necessarily endorse any of these negative characterizations. Instead, I suggest that exploring a more naturalistic virtue theory and its coherence with perspectivism and will to power will show that Nietzsche offers a positive moral theory. Yet, each is a topic for future research.

Bibliography

- Clark, Maudemarie. *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. (Lightning Source, 2010).
- Danto, Arthur Coleman. *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. (Columbia University Press, 1980).
- Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche*. (Harper, 1991).
- Klein, Wayne. *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy*. (State Univ. of New York Press, 1997).
- Kaufmann, Walter Arnold. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. (Princeton University Press, 2013).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (together with *The Case of Wagner*) (New York: Random House, 1967).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1968).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Untimely Meditations*. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Writings from the Early Notebooks*. (Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human all too Human*. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Gay Science; with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Penguin Books, 1987).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (together with *Ecce Homo*) (New York: Random House, 1967).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. (Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).
- Richardson, John. *Nietzsche's System*. (Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Williams, Linda L. *Nietzsche's Mirror: The World as Will to Power*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).
- Welshon, Rex. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).
- Young, Julian. *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*. (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Zimmerman, Michael J. and Bradley, Ben, "Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/value-intrinsic-extrinsic/>.