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The Hither Side of Good and Evil: Desire and the Will to Power

by

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Abstract:

The following is an analysis of the affinity between the accounts of value of Nietzsche and Levinas — two philosophers commonly thought to be antithetical. I propose an account of value, derived from the aforementioned authors, according to which an enigmatic phenomenon beyond or hither from being orients one toward an invisible good. The analysis suggests that despite the fundamental role of value in philosophy and thought, value necessarily remains obscure.

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“Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.”¹ What Levinas expresses here is the desire to justify our tables of values. We want to know that the code by which we live, the values behind the imperatives we subscribe to and hold others accountable to is not assumed under false pretenses and deceptions. Levinas, like every philosopher after Nietzsche, and especially after the *Shoah*, writes after the death of God—a “quasi-empirical”² event after which value, ethics and morality have to be reconsidered. The task is to offer an adequate account of value that can answer to the contemporary, now cliché claim about the death of God.

After Nietzsche’s proclamation we find that there is no external guarantor of value. The possibility is lost that an account of value can be had which abstracts from a subjective account of one’s identifying value. The possibility of a value in the absence of any assent by the holders of that value is impossible—where assent may be direct or indirect, a conscious or unconscious choice, or prior to the latent ‘ability to choose’ whatsoever. ‘Value’ is always something *found* to be valuable, where this finding or founding is attributed to a subject. There is no such higher authority; but more trenchantly, external validation—an authoritative, divine stamp of approval—simply does not confer value. After the death of God we require an account of value that does not appeal to an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent guarantor. Even divinely-ordained value presupposes a *personal* affirmation of the divine authority to which one defers, and a subsequent recognition of the value of those prescribed values. Derivative of this fact is the revelation that truth cannot be the simple condition of value that it seems to be for other philosophical matters. Value cannot be supposed a wholly objective matter.

Both Nietzsche and Levinas find value on the hither side of truth, being and subjectivity. Both found a rebranded, quasi-metaphysical doctrine to support an account of value beyond, or hither from, truth and being. Nietzsche ordains the *will to power*—with its expression, the abysmal thought of eternal return—the highest value. Levinas, too, ventures through a veritable abyss—an infinity, beyond being—to salvage the Good, which is elucidated through Desire. In some sense Levinas embodies the role of Zarathustra’s bold searcher and researcher, venturer and adventurer, who is lured by sonorous flute to the maelstrom³—the null-site or abyss; and is not Nietzsche the “exceptional breath that has made this ‘beyond’,” this abyss, “resound”?⁴ The null-site and the abyss, will to power and Desire, are answers to the same question. The formal similarity of both the question asked and the answer given by Nietzsche and Levinas is the important connection between the two philosophers.

Nietzsche does not adequately address—perhaps because he believes he cannot—what exactly a value is; and his views on what specifically is valuable are obscure beyond broad generalizations.

The deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear—meaninglessness approaches! We have created the world that possesses values! Knowing this, we know, too, that reverence for truth is

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969), 21.

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), 97.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘On the Vision and the Riddle,’ (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006).

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 132.

already the consequence of an illusion—and that one should value more than truth the force that forms, simplifies, shapes, invents. ‘Everything is false! Everything is permitted!’ Only with a certain obtuseness of vision, a will to simplicity, does the beautiful, the ‘valuable’ appear: in itself, it is I know not what.⁵

Regarding the opening passages of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche is infamous for having prioritized the question of value and for putting truth itself within the scope of value. Nietzsche claims here, in a passage from his notebooks from 1884, that one ought to seek not truth, and not even an understanding of value itself, but an understanding of that which creates the world of values. That any understanding of such a force is itself situated within the world of our created values could not have escaped Nietzsche for more than a moment. Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s insight is valid. Having finally recognized in our postmortem analysis after the death of God that we cannot understand values apart from human valuation, our question concerning value ought not to be first what is of value, but why and how human beings value. How does the dimension of value arise for us? It is this latter question concerning value that Nietzsche answers with will to power, and Levinas with Desire. This is the question we will investigate through Nietzsche and Levinas, then: what is responsible for the manifestation of human values?

That these two philosophers—*superficial* antitheses, occupying antipodes of the moral spectrum—have some important relation is not commonly proposed. “What philosopher is not concerned with ethics, with values? What philosopher does not relate such concerns with the search for truth?”⁶ one might ask. Or more extremely, one might assert, “Bottom line: Levinas’s philosophy is based in ‘love of the neighbor,’ while Nietzsche’s is based on destroying ‘love of the neighbor’ for the sake of ‘love of self.’”⁷ That the philosopher of neighbourly love and the destroyer of such love—the once self-proclaimed Anti-Christ⁸—are representative of anything in common is not a popular opinion.⁹

However, in his own way—and with respect to Nietzsche, one’s own way is the only respectable way—Levinas might be seen as embodying the future philosopher that Nietzsche had heralded, the philosopher who finds (or founds) value out of an abyss, beyond reason and objective, logical deduction. From Plato to Husserl, Levinas says, philosophers have sought the “metaphysical extraction from being”—perhaps the point of view demanded by a discourse on value. And, despite the ubiquitous failure of everyone involved in such attempts, the “Nietzschean man above all”¹⁰ has been such an attempt. Given Levinas’ own attempted

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1968), §602.

⁶ Richard A. Cohen, personal correspondence, November 28, 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cf. Letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, 3/4 April, 1883.

⁹ The importance of the connection between these two philosophers is perhaps only being widely appreciated recently with the publication of Stauffer and Bergo’s collection: *Nietzsche and Levinas: After the Death of a Certain God*. The general conception for the present paper came to me through research into Nietzsche and Levinas prior to my encounter with this collection of essays. However, this collection has helped me refine my perspective on both philosophers generally in a way that deserves credit. See my review: *Symposium* 15.1 (Spring 2011) <<http://www.cscs.org/2010/11/21/jill-stauffer-and-bettina-bergo-eds-nietzsche-and-levinas.html>>.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 8.

metaphysical ‘extraction’ from being, we might take Levinas’ observation as a confirmation that he is attempting Nietzsche’s task—and that he ventures to do it better than Nietzsche had himself. One has to abstract from the particularities of their philosophies—from altruism and megalomania—to see the formal kinship in their accounts of value. It is the common appeal to an abyss or null-site, to a measure of value beyond being, that is decisive and illuminating. Both Nietzsche and Levinas, I will propose, approach value in a similar light. Both require a way of speaking of value which delivers it from the scope of truth and looming nihilism. Ultimately both found an ambiguous principle of valuation which animates and directs the self prior to the self’s ‘existence’. Furthermore, Levinas elucidates his principle of valuation on the hither side of being in a way Nietzsche was unable to—specifically, in terms of a diachrony; and this elucidation of Levinas’ own principle can be co-opted for a better understanding of Nietzsche’s will to power.

The connection between Nietzsche and Levinas is vital not for the particularities of the answers they provide—one can still hear indignant protests—but for the similarity in the way the questions are posed and the common form of the answers given. Both realize the fundamental importance of value—practically and theoretically—in their own way; and both appreciate the inherent ambiguousness of the ‘phenomenon’ of value which resists systematicity, thematic and logical representation. Both understand the priority of the practical question; and it is only with respect to the value question that others can be important or ‘imperative’. That two philosophers who so radically diverge on morality nevertheless have a similar understanding of the formal structure of value ought to lend even more plausibility to the common element. A review of the accounts of value of two philosophers who take seriously the death of a ‘certain’ God—an *ontological* God, Levinas would propose—two philosophers who do not want to identify new metaphysical “worlds behind the scenes,”¹¹ ought to be illuminating concerning the question of value. At the heart of the inquiry will be a comparison of the axiological principle of each: will to power and Desire, the fundamental principles which are said to animate the valuing subject. The goal of the review of Nietzsche’s and Levinas’ accounts, then, is a greater understanding of how the dimension of value arises for human beings.

¹¹ Ibid.

Nietzsche

2

To claim that Nietzsche's philosophy is resistant to systematization or cohesive re-presentation is not to do sufficient justice to his philosophy. Nietzsche's philosophy is so thoroughly recalcitrant to systematization that an attempted interpretation that leaves the scholar with significantly fewer questions can be regarded with suspicion. Nietzsche's philosophy, for prudent philosophical reasons, is not the defence of opinions or truths (which are always ossified, obstinate convictions) with good reasons. Philosophy is the constant venturing to new possible truths with the ever-present suspicion of even one's most highly held beliefs. Philosophy is the ongoing tempting and attempting, the venturing to new perspectives.

Many scholars have been preoccupied with trying to ascertain from Nietzsche's writings what he personally thought to be true; and much Nietzsche scholarship revolves around the decision of which writings—those works published in his lifetime versus his posthumously published notes—represent his final thoughts. Many such scholars appear concerned with which interpretation of Nietzsche's writings he would have approved of—not to have one more perspective at their disposal so much as to support their own conclusions with Nietzsche's personal authority. This is what I will avoid. Less important is what Nietzsche personally believed, and more important is what insight can be coaxed from his writing *despite* Nietzsche's personal thoughts. The faith in hardened truths and convictions—nor those of famous philosophers—is not for one with integrity, the bold searcher and researcher. "There is something arbitrary in his stopping here," affirming this doctrine as true, "in his not digging any deeper here, and putting his spade away—there is also something suspicious about it."¹² This supposition is reflected in Nietzsche's philosophy. Even within his published works (often within a single book), the same topic is often approached in distinct ways, often ways that yield contradictory results; and it is not always clear which—if any—conclusions Nietzsche identifies with.¹³ And whatever Nietzsche's views at the time of his death, a longer-living Nietzsche would have called them into question. The consequence is that any interpretation of Nietzsche which attempts to render a coherent view of his philosophy is already a 'liberal' interpretation.

For Nietzsche, values lie outside the scope of logical truth, as a matter of subjective affirmation. Nietzsche's opposition to systematicity is a resolution of professional, philosophical 'conduct'¹⁴ but stems from a more fundamental philosophical position, namely that objective—broadly speaking 'logical'—truth does not exhaust the measure of 'validity' by which philosophical positions and doctrines might be evaluated. It needs to be shown why for Nietzsche value is not simply a matter of objective truth and why, for related reasons, it is difficult to speak of this primordial will to power. The proceeding analysis of Nietzsche is intended as a general synopsis of value as will to power and the human capacity for valuation. Nietzsche's opposition

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001), §289.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols (and Other Writings)*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005) §55: "Are lies and convictions even opposed?"

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols (and Other Writings)* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005) 'Arrows and Epigrams,' §26: "The will to a system is a lack of integrity."

and recalcitrance to systematicity, then, both justifies an interpretation of his work which does not correspond directly to common assessments of Nietzsche—his philosophy is simply too chameleonic for any one interpretation to be ‘right’—and it also indicates that will to power should both indicate why objective truth is not exhaustive for philosophical validity and why, in turn, will to power will not be wholly intelligible in objective terms. Something of it *necessarily* remains enigmatic, where this ambiguity is not simply a function of Nietzsche’s writing but is telling concerning metaphysics.

3

That value lies outside the scope of truth for Nietzsche is apparent from many of his writings; and doubt concerning the supremacy of objective truth is a prevalent theme. Philosophical investigation ceases to be for him something objective, knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Nietzsche sees a turning point in human activity beginning with Socrates. He characterizes Socrates as the prototype of the theoretical, scientific, rational man.¹⁵ Socrates marks the advent of theory—logical, objective investigation—which prevails over the myth and tragedy that had been pursued hitherto. Socrates effectively constitutes the beginnings of the search for objective, rational truth, the standard by which human activity in philosophy and the sciences is conducted ever since. Nietzsche considers this turn a historical fact. It is not the inherent nature of the human ‘desire to know’ to be the search for objective truth. This is a contingency beginning with Socrates, purportedly without substantial precedent among the Greeks. Additionally, Socrates’ decision to pursue dialectics, to demand good reasons and grounding for all claims and actions, is not the result of an appeal to a higher truth. There is no ‘objective’ notion of truth that itself demands we seek objective truth. At bottom it is a valuation, not a logical judgement, that truth ought to be pursued in this form. Put otherwise, Nietzsche has it that valuation is primary and epistemological considerations (whether they are ever fully resolved by Nietzsche) are necessarily secondary. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche attributes the historical turn toward reason and truth to Euripides’ and Socrates’ lack of understanding of Greek tragedy. The failure of the two to appreciate art founded on a Dionysiac instinct leads to Socrates’ formula, “In order to be beautiful, everything must be reason.”¹⁶ In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche attributes the Socratic turn to the Greeks’ previous overindulgence in the instincts: “Everywhere, instincts were in anarchy.”¹⁷ The Socratic turn toward dialectics, truth, the formula ‘reason = virtue = happiness,’ was the necessary *cure* for the pathology of rampant, unfettered instincts. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, this Socratic formula is attributed to the slave revolt. The slaves—the Jews, Christians, and those of a plebeian, Socratic disposition—affirm their own talents for passiveness, cunning, and ‘refrain’ from demonstrations of strength. Opposed to this had been the noble instincts which rely on “*unconscious* [i.e., non-dialectical] instincts or [...] imprudence.”¹⁸ Less important than the precision of Nietzsche’s genealogy of the pursuit of objective truth—which he approaches in various, potentially inconsistent ways—is his general claim that the *pursuit* of objective truth is not only a human convention, but an

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Problem of Socrates,” §9.

¹⁸ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1967), I, §10.

aesthetic, moral, value-laden choice, and his claim that there is no higher truth which can justify the objective model of truth.

Nietzsche claims the limits of this sort of logical, dialectical, theoretical—*Socratic*—investigation are being realized in his own time, when “logic curls up around itself [...] and finally bites its own tail.”¹⁹ Kant’s philosophy epitomizes for Nietzsche what the search for absolute truth leads to: a dead end. Knowledge is defined as other-worldly and beyond human attainment. It is defined so as to be inaccessible.²⁰ But principally for Nietzsche (for the former derives its significance from the latter), this ultimately leads to nihilism. The ideal of objective truth leads to the division of worlds and the forsaking of the corporeal world—as in Platonic, Kantian and Christian true-apparent-world dichotomies. Truth for Nietzsche—the historical object of humanity’s focus since Socrates—is not an objective matter (according to the standards of truth itself, i.e., it does not ground itself epistemically; but it is also not ‘objectively’ valuable). As such there is no objective truth that can either condemn us to nihilism nor elevate us to divinely-ordained, absolute value. Values are manifest outside the scope of truth.

4

That value is not within the scope of a simple, objective notion of truth follows from Nietzsche’s account of truth (as dependent on subjective valuation).²¹ But it can also be seen from Nietzsche’s discourse on value itself. Nietzsche offers an account whereby values are founded by affirmation rather than based on objective grounds. His character Zarathustra repeatedly claims that value is a product of *valuing*, or the subjective affirmation of values. “Esteeming itself is the treasure and jewel of all esteemed things. Only through esteeming is there value.”²² Value is faithfully affirmed rather than found true. Value that one has deduced through veracious reasons by ‘following a thread’ or chain of reasoning is not something wholeheartedly *affirmed*, but is contingently valued based on the reasons one is able to provide for it.²³ The notion of ‘contingent value’ (contingent on reasons) already suggests something less valuable, something derivative. The dialectician is, according to Nietzsche, the one who lacks real conviction of his own valuations—hence one without the strength to simply affirm values and

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 75.

²⁰ That this would not be Kant’s precise interpretation of his own philosophy can be assumed.

²¹ What in particular this means for Nietzsche depends on an analysis of perspectivism which I do not intend to deliver. Such an analysis would take the present inquiry too far off course. Valuations become for Nietzsche perspectives one has of the world, where the *truth* of the world cannot be abstracted from these perspectives or valuations. Cf. *Will to Power*, §567. Also, *Genealogy of Morals*, III, §12: “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing.’” Perspectivism—conveniently enough for my own analysis—seems to foreshadow the phenomenological approach Levinas is disposed to. Both perspectivism and phenomenology assume that the truth of the ‘object’ cannot be wholly abstracted from its observation by the observer.

²² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘On a Thousand and One Goals.’

²³ *Ibid.*, ‘On the Vision and the Riddle.’

thereby make them genuinely valuable.²⁴ Moreover, the traditional claim that truth applies to value itself devolves upon a *valuation* of truth.²⁵

However, Nietzsche does not simply allocate truth and value to different realms, distinct spheres of human activity and concern. It is the standard of objective truth which, when turned back on itself and the values implicit therein, results in nihilism. As long as the logical standard of objective truth is so highly revered, as Levinas would say, it comes to preside and exercise authority over all realms of human concern. Nietzsche realizes this. When God is thought to be the arbiter of truth and being—such that these are maintained in objectivity—value is seen as similarly substantiated. When God ‘dies’, when this standard of truth turns back on itself and exorcises God (as epistemically suspect) from its workings, we see that our values no longer measure up to the objective standard we had held. Part of the overcoming of nihilistic values founded on a reverence for objective truth, then, is showing the latter to be of second rank to value: not its reciprocal but on a realm ‘below’ or inferior to value. “The question of values is more *fundamental* than the question of certainty: the latter becomes serious only by presupposing that the value question has already been answered.”²⁶ A punctilious, honest, investigation into value, even—or *especially*—by the highest standards of philosophical rigour demands that we question the *value* of truth and its pursuit.²⁷ Truth lies in the scope of value, not vice versa.

The lurking question is what sort of priority value has over truth—an epistemic priority, or ‘metaphysical’. The answer is more akin to an axiological priority. The question, ‘what is true?’, or ‘what is truth?’ does not guarantee or presuppose that one will obtain a true answer, or even that a true answer would *justify* one’s having inquired.²⁸ However, the question, ‘what is value?’, or ‘what is valuable?’ safely assumes the value of the question—and hence the inquiry justifies itself axiologically before any answer. The beginning of philosophy is not knowing (*philo-sophy* implies an original *lack* of wisdom) but acting, living, seeking, where all the latter are the motivation for Socratic philosophy and the search for truth. Insofar as these things presuppose valuation and not truth, value is shown to be primary. The Socratically-informed response to this brief analysis is, ‘is it true?’ The Nietzschean response in turn is, ‘who should care?’ where this is not a dismissal of the question but a demonstration of the fact that even objective truth is only of concern to the degree that one has invested interest in it according to some valuation.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘The Problem of Socrates,’ §5-6. Cf. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §585. “It is a measure of the degree of strength of will to what extent one can do without meaning in things, to what extent one can endure to live in a meaningless world *because one organizes a small portion of it oneself*. [...’M]en of knowledge,’ who desire only to ascertain what is, are those who cannot *fix anything as it ought to be*.”

²⁵ The opening passages of *Beyond Good and Evil* are devoted to a critique of the value of truth and the prevalent will to truth.

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §322.

²⁷ Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §1. “Granted, we will truth: why not untruth instead? And uncertainty?”

²⁸ Similar considerations are made by Levinas when he supposes that philosophy properly begins with *critique*—which is not an epistemological but axiologically (and specifically, for Levinas, *ethical*) category. Cf. Sarah Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2009), 199.

If anything can be said of Nietzsche's philosophy without inviting protests, it is that for him valuing, or affirmation of values, confers value. Human valuation is found to underlie all proposed truths: paradoxically—or at least problematically—including the present claim. This problem persists through Nietzsche's works and is manifest in the principle of will to power when we attempt to determine its status—i.e., whether it is true. Though Levinas affords us a better way to approach this problem, it will have to persist for now. For Nietzsche, value is not 'proven' by scientific experiment or deductive reasoning within the confines of rigorous logic, and nor is it granted to us by a god. Value is a matter for the creative child, not the Socratic scholar.

5

Having characterized value as valuation or affirmation, Nietzsche provides criteria and conditions on the basis of which one can judge and rank particular valuations. The absolute relativism concerning value, which Nietzsche is sometimes seen as presenting, is self-defeating if not qualified. An account of value which cannot discriminate between particular valuations is no account of value at all. Equality—a frequent topic of Nietzsche's writing—is an abolition of value insofar as everything is without rank. A distinction between 'good' and 'bad' implies the comparatives 'better' and 'worse'. Equality of valuations is tantamount to a rejection of value. Nietzsche provides some qualifications of the nature of would-be valuers in order to discriminate between particular valuations. Without this qualification, there is no reason to combat nihilism which would be as valid as any positive table of values. A completely neutral, relative account of value at best undermines itself, and at worst implies a nihilistic condemnation of value itself insofar as all values are equalized.

The criterion Nietzsche invokes is power. All of life's activity including valuation is, for Nietzsche, will to power—"[v]aluation itself is only this will to power"²⁹—and the paradox of this claim will have to be further assessed. "What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power."³⁰ Kaufmann says, "the quantitative degree of power is the measure of value. [...] Against the relativists [...] Nietzsche urges that there is such a common element which makes comparative judgements of value about the moral codes of various societies possible."³¹ The will to power is the principle by which Nietzsche is able to make distinctions between, for example—or predominantly—slave morality and master morality. Though both are affirmations, slave-value is constituted by a negative affirmation and resentment (a dearth of power), and thereby differs from master-value. An anonymous reviewer of a recent paper of mine claimed that, "Nietzsche is not trying to suggest that master morality is superior to slave morality nor that slave morality is superior to master morality." This is false. Nietzsche condemns valuations founded on *ressentiment* (and therefore impotence) in favour of those founded on strength and power.³² Nietzsche's philosophy, from (at least) *The Genealogy* and on, can only be made sense of on the supposition that will to power (whatever the status

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §675.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §674. Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §13, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche *The Gay Science* (Toronto: Random House, 1974), §349.

³¹ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (New York: Princeton UP, 1975), 173.

³² *The Genealogy* and the *Anti-Christ* are probably the most explicit examples of this condemnation of 'slave' morality, though it is discussed elsewhere as well.

we attribute to this doctrine) is a criterion of valuation. This is the pivot on which his entire polemic against monotheistically-founded values and nihilism turns.

The status of will to power is the subject of extensive debate. There is widespread disagreement about what sort of doctrine it is: whether it is metaphysical, empirical, ontological, axiological, whether it is *true* or interpretational, itself a product of valuation. Its conception and scope evolve over time for Nietzsche; he seems to embrace an increasingly extreme form of it. Sometimes it seems to constitute a primordial principle of earthly life intended to supplant a Spinozan-Darwinian will to survival.³³ Elsewhere will to power seems not to imply more than a psychological doctrine.³⁴ However, some passages from at least 1885-6 suggest will to power is an all-encompassing principle by which the world in its entirety proceeds. Paragraph 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, appears to be a hypothetical deduction of will to power with the purpose of establishing it as an alternative to a mechanistic view of the world.³⁵ Nietzsche's writing seems to suggest this most strongly, but moreover his account of value, in the way I have presented it, demands that the will to power have some kind of claim to universality.

For Nietzsche's conception of value to be viable, valuation must precede and inform truth; otherwise truth undermines our values. This is similar to the reasons Levinas will give for why ethics must precede ontology. If ontology is primary, ethics is unsubstantiated and unfulfillable. The 'being-standard' of ontology comes to dominate everywhere as long as ontology is assumed first philosophy; and it marginalizes ethics insofar as ethics does not conform to this standard.³⁶ In Nietzsche's case this means that Christian values succumb to nihilism when exposed to the self-imposed demands of objective truth, when truth precedes value. "The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' or the concept of 'truth' [...]" Conclusion: the faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism."³⁷ What is clear is that will to power is not in turn taken to be objectively true by the standard of traditional philosophy. As I have alluded, value escapes the scope and criterion of truth by informing truth. Whatever the status of will to power, it is not a simple, objectively-true, philosophically-verifiable theory—empirical or otherwise.

John T. Wilcox's study *Truth and Value in Nietzsche: A Study of his Metaethics and Epistemology*, construes will to power in an empirical or physiological way.³⁸ He says that the best defence of value as power of affirmation is to say that, physiologically speaking, there is no alternative and, if Nietzsche is right, we all implicitly accept the power-standard of valuation. That we all implicitly accept the power-standard, and that it is a physiological compulsion that we do so, is certainly possible. That does not imply that it is or is thought to be objectively true in the sense

³³ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §349, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §13.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'On a Thousand and One Goals,' 'On Self-Overcoming.'

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §36.

³⁶ Cf. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, I, A, §4.

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §12. Cf. *Will to Power*, §69, fn.39. Here, too, Nietzsche implies that a prior valuation of philosophy, of 'the will to truth,' is responsible for nihilism. This comes from a planned outline for his would-be future work *Will to Power* from 1886.

³⁸ John T. Wilcox, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche: A Study of his Metaethics and Epistemology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), VII, §5.

that an objective analysis could in principle verify it. However, the acceptability of Wilcox's interpretation hinges on an interpretation of the term 'physiological'. Will to power cannot be physiological in the sense that the biological sciences could confirm the theory. The biological sciences, or any *Wissenschaft* more broadly, presupposes will to power for Nietzsche. Having contributed the foreword to Wilcox's book, Wilcox likely takes his cue from Walter Kaufmann who propounds a similar view. Kaufmann, too, takes will to power to be an empirical principle because it is derived from observation. It is an observation of nature.³⁹ However, Nietzsche realizes that measuring value against an empirical or natural standard—one within the scope of objective truth claims—undermines value. It delivers it over to nihilism. A bio-*logical* doctrine presupposes the Socratic-theoretical model of truth that Nietzsche is attempting to dispel. The principle ultimately extends to preside over all being (or becoming), and *ipso facto* will to power cannot have the status of a simple empirical observation which would be the conclusion of a purely empirical study. This is analogous to the fact that the mechanistic world view—which the will to power is intended to replace—is not itself a scientifically-proven, empirical fact.

Maudemarie Clark recalls Nietzsche's claim that philosophers always interpret the world according to presupposed valuations. She proposes that Nietzsche offers a formally valid but unsound 'proof' of will to power (the premises of which are explicitly or implicitly rejected by Nietzsche elsewhere) to—quite circuitously—demonstrate that he does not believe in the truth of the will to power, but that it is a mere projection of his values. Clark depicts the will to power as simply a great, multi-work *bluff*: Nietzsche "arrived at his characterization of nature by reading his values into it. He wants nature to live only after his own image, as an eternal generalization and glorification of what he finds valuable."⁴⁰ On this view Nietzsche invents a doctrine which cannot be refuted—or even *logically* engaged with, for that matter—because it makes no claims to truth. It becomes validated by our acceptance—our validation—of it. That value presides over truth, that human values are effectively *posited*, is in line with what I have said of Nietzsche. However, that Nietzsche's doctrine ought to be taken, from the viewpoint of his own philosophy, as *simply* one more interpretation on par with all others is implausible. This would indeed make Nietzsche's philosophy nothing more than a bluff.

If nothing else, Nietzsche believes will to power as the highest value to be somehow warranted—whether we explain this in epistemological or axiological terms. In fact, it is will to power, the competition of drives, the positing of values and the accompanying notions of perspectives and perspectivism that itself lends credit to an interpretational account of the world—i.e., one in which values come to dominate. Clark accurately notes that to declare will to power an objectively true doctrine without qualification, in light of even a vague understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy, is impossible. Nietzsche has not rebuked monotheistic values simply to instill the tyranny of another obstinate, absolute value. However, Clark's particular explanation for why Nietzsche offers an explanation like that provided in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §36 is unconvincing. A more consistent explanation, more consistent with Nietzsche's *modus operandi*, would be that he approaches the problem from multiple angles, taking multiple courses of

³⁹ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 179-80, 224.

⁴⁰ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990), 224. Incidentally, depending on what Clark has in mind specifically, contrary evidence seems to be found in *Ecce Homo* and other biographical details of Nietzsche which seem to portray him as a sickly, unsuccessful loner.

thought and attempting to see where various approaches lead rather than positing a truth and working backward to a 'reasonable' explanation. This is why one passage of his work will often contradict the next.⁴¹ Ironically, Clark takes Nietzsche's claim about philosophers' tendency to project values into their philosophies at face value and assumes that Nietzsche merely does this in an upfront way—having recognized that everyone does so inevitably. We might ask whether a deeper truth is concealed, whether the philosophers'—and Nietzsche's—propensity to do this is not indicative of the workings of a more subterranean agent—a *deeper will*, even. Values lie beneath all philosophies, including all those exhumed beneath *those* valuations and philosophies, and so on *ad infinitum*. This ought to make Nietzsche the prime culprit for such axiological projections. These never-ending background philosophies and values behind values will ultimately have to be addressed when determining the status of will to power; but this does not mean that will to power is not seen from Nietzsche's philosophy as somehow unique. The simple solution that will to power is no more valid than any other doctrine is unsatisfactory for the way it trivializes Nietzsche's views as a whole—one can simply dismiss them on that premise alone. But equally, as is Clark's point, is it unsatisfactory to relegate them to the status of object truth which would equally trivialize his former arguments. I maintain that Levinas constitutes a third option which I will subsequently explore. Incidentally, Clark begins by arguing that will to power cannot be a metaphysical or cosmological doctrine because Nietzsche does not grant such 'truths'—and she then concludes that, "will to power is not a doctrine at all" because Nietzsche does not believe it to be true.⁴² That it is not objectively *true* (in a 'synchronic' way, Levinas will say), however, could then be seen as grounds for considering it, indeed, a *metaphysical* doctrine which, as Clark notes, Nietzsche believes do not properly evoke the question of truth.

What Clark seeks is a way to explain will to power given Nietzsche's pervasive claim that all such principles of valuation are only themselves valuations. In line with this, Martin Heidegger's explanation of will to power seeks similar ends. Heidegger calls will to power the *what* of being. "What Nietzsche perceives and posits as the basic character of being as a whole is what he calls the 'will to power.'"⁴³ Heidegger believes that Nietzsche 'degrades' being by making it a condition of will to power and valuation.⁴⁴ Heidegger's negative *evaluation* of Nietzsche's philosophy aside, there is substantial evidence in Nietzsche's writing to corroborate his assessment of will to power.

One should not understand this compulsion to construct concepts, species, forms, purposes, laws [...] as if they enabled us to fix the real world; but as a compulsion to arrange *a* world for

⁴¹ For a particularly apt example see Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008), "The Wanderer and his Shadow," §202 and §206. The first warns against the stupidity of mountain climbers who rush along without appreciating the beautiful views on the way—they reach the summit fatigued and disappointed. The second passage (only a few lines later) warns against the stupidity of forgetting one's objective and dithering along one's journey. (Both sections, indeed, even employ the term 'stupidity' to highlight Nietzsche's intentional contrast of the two passages.)

⁴² Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 227.

⁴³ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 4* (New York: Harperone. 1991), 6.

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche, 'God is Dead,'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 103. "Yet, in that Being is accorded worth as a value, it is already degraded to a condition posited by the will to power itself."

ourselves in which our existence is made possible:—we thereby create a world which is calculable, simplified, comprehensible, etc, for us.⁴⁵

The will to power posits values, fixes the world in and by which the will to power engages. Nietzsche notes that after the death of God the world is seen as valueless. To salvage value he cannot simply propose that the world is objectively valueless and then ‘append’ values via our esteem of this valueless world. This approach leaves it *false* that the world is valuable. We would be nihilists who had deluded ourselves into liking the world that we still fundamentally take to be valueless. Instead, concomitant with the withdrawal of value from the scope of truth is the denial of a ‘true’ world beyond our valuations. It is this determinative power of valuation that yields its efficacy. Effectively, as Heidegger suggests, the world of being becomes a product of valuation. The confusion regarding the status of will to power arises in that will to power *is* the propensity to value, the force of valuation, to begin with. Because will to power exercises valuation and thereby produces a world in which to operate—a world *in which* to will power (for how could it operate in nothingness?)—values become the conditions of their own condition: value wills the world in which will to power affirms value. Pertinent in Heidegger’s assessment is that, if we take the will to power seriously, it implies the world—the only conceivable world—is the world posited by will to power and our valuations. Being is will to power. By what measure of value, then, Heidegger thinks being is *degraded* when regarded as a value, I am unaware; but Heidegger seems to be on the right track in taking will to power as the principle or ‘what’ of being. The will to power is universal and stands behind all of being insofar as will to power, the positing of values, is the condition of the world. But, that will to power and value are somehow reciprocally both conditioned and conditioning is problematic and has its resolution in a different perspective on the significance of will to power as value.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, §22, will to power is presented as a thought experiment. Will to power assumes the supremacy of valuation over truth, and as such the essence of truth as interpretation—because valuations are subjective affirmations, interpretations. Nietzsche preempts the objection that his own theory of will to power is itself only interpretation and coyly retorts, “so much the better!” That Nietzsche believes it to have some real validity—even if not in terms of objective truth—over and above other contending interpretations is beyond doubt. Evidence of this is his condemnation of Schopenhauer’s supposedly determinative ‘will’ compared with Nietzsche’s own doctrine. Nietzsche claims that Schopenhauer’s described will is only an instance of the will to power, where the latter is not merely another interpretation but a better one yielded by a superior analysis. Supposing Nietzsche to really believe that will to power was only an arbitrary interpretation equivalently valid to others would imply that the bulk of his entire corpus had been fluff. On the other hand, §22 of *Beyond Good and Evil* is not the only instance in which Nietzsche emphasizes the interpretational nature of everything, including his own theories:

“[T]here are only facts”—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 want to do such a thing. “Everything is subjective,” you say; but even this is interpretation. The “subject” is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.—

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §521.

Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis. In so far as the word “knowledge” has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.—“Perspectivism.” It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.⁴⁶

Here again, it seems as though Nietzsche, in the process, ‘unsays’ what he is attempting to say. His ‘said’ covers up his ‘saying’, one might venture boldly. If everything is interpretation, does he not beg the question in attempting to explain this scenario further in terms of competing drives and will to power? Is his ‘meta-interpretation’ not still an interpretation? However, in this instance and others, will to power, the competition of drives, is spoken of as though it were true. The world, Nietzsche wants to say, is somehow constituted by perspectives, interpretations, which boil down to *valuations*—manifestations of the will to power. Everything outside this will and these valuations, including the subject who wields (or more accurately, is wielded *by*) this will to power, is illusory, does not possess being, *is not*.

The reason Nietzsche cannot unequivocally proclaim the validity of will to power stems from the same difficulty Levinas faces when looking at the subject on the hither side of consciousness and being. We cannot get to the ‘bottom’ of our internally competing drives to see the entire chain; we can never get ‘behind’ our will to power in order to characterize it unequivocally as such. Likewise we can never get ‘outside’ the whole of reality, or assume a perspective outside the whole, from which we could then characterize it.⁴⁷ But the dilemma is not just pragmatic. To get to the ‘bottom of’ or ‘outside of’ the whole is inconceivable such that the phrases might be said to be literally unintelligible. Outside of these perspectives is nothing—or perhaps not even nothing.

Will to power has universal scope, and is somehow superior to other interpretations and valuations; but it is not objectively true, and cannot be stated in terms that would extricate it from its own scope and assessment. When concretely expressed, it too is a manifestation of the will to power.

6

This difficulty is something Nietzsche was surely aware of but did not address. Quoting at length again:

The deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear—meaninglessness approaches! We have created the world that possesses values! Knowing this, we know, too, that reverence for truth is already the consequence of an illusion—and that one should value more than truth the force that forms, simplifies, shapes, invents. ‘Everything is false! Everything is permitted!’ Only with a certain obtuseness of vision, a will to simplicity, does the beautiful, the ‘valuable’ appear: in itself, it is I know not what.

⁴⁶ Ibid., §481.

⁴⁷ Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘The Four Great Errors,’ §8.

What Nietzsche admits is that, even assuming the validity of will to power and its accompanying perspectival account of existence, something about value remains enigmatic. Nietzsche, perhaps prudently, re-routes from the question of value to the question of what gives birth to value, to that which we owe the presence or ‘phenomenon’ of value. Will to power is his answer. But recalling that he had withdrawn from the question of truth to the question of value, and from the question of value to the question of will to power, it remains to be asked whether value and truth do not reassert themselves. Further of note is that in this passage Nietzsche does not say that value is *nothing*, as he claims is the case of noumena. He does not deny the validity of speaking of values—he simply says they are enigmatic and that we fool ourselves when we claim a comprehensive elucidation of them. Finally, that *values* lie behind all of our philosophical judgments is perhaps the single most fundamental claim of Nietzsche’s philosophy. The argument that effectively overcomes nihilism is the claim that the worthlessness of being cannot be a bare, objective fact, but that it itself is yielded by human valuation.⁴⁸

However, he also has not adequately touched on the problem of value insofar as he does not get to the ‘bottom’ of things. He stops short (‘suspiciously,’ we might say in a Nietzschean spirit) of addressing value and instead alleges the force behind valuation.⁴⁹ But without saying what a value is, and how and why the will to power determines value, Nietzsche has not established anything of interest concerning our valuations themselves. That the will to power is the original condition of value and valuation is moot unless it can be shown that we ought to take this connection seriously and inform our values accordingly. We can ignore the principle of will to power when we are determining our tables of values if it cannot be shown that, given will to power, we ought to form our values in recognition of this principle. What Nietzsche needs to show decisively is how human valuation arises out of will to power, and why that means we ought to embrace values of strength rather than weakness. Only thereby can we conflate the two and determine that a valuation founded on an explicit reverence for, and exercise of, power is superior to a reactionary valuation on the part of ailing, impotent, resentful life. Only by showing how will to power effects valuation—and therefore showing more clearly how the possibility of valuation comes to human beings—can will to power overcome nihilism.

One option is a return to Heidegger’s account. Whatever his answer and his ulterior, tangential reasons for asking the question, Heidegger asks the right one: “But why and to what extent is the will to power a value positing? What does Nietzsche understand by *value*?”⁵⁰ And Heidegger believes the answer comes in §715 of *Will to Power*. “The viewpoint of ‘value’ is the viewpoint of *conditions of preservation* and *enhancement* with regard to complex constructs of relative life-duration within becoming.”⁵¹ Heidegger says, “[t]he will to power is the ground of the necessity of value-positing and of the origin of the possibility of value judgement.”⁵² What Heidegger proposes, and what is *prima facie* plausible, is that the will to power posits a world of

⁴⁸ Cf. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §12, §20, §36.

⁴⁹ In other instances, of course, values are will to power, and will to power is itself interpretation, a *value*. Either we stop short of the question of value itself, or we offer a circular account of value and will to power.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 4*, 62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis Heidegger’s. Much of the same material is contained in “The Word of Nietzsche,” 74, including the particular passage from Nietzsche and its explication.

⁵² *Ibid.*

values in which to act; and the world is posited such that the ‘willer’ can exercise the greatest power.⁵³ This explains why philosophy seems, according to Nietzsche, to merely reveal new layers of ossified valuations, why truths are only obstinate convictions posited by the ‘valuer’ for his own advantage. A possible interpretation of the fact that Nietzsche candidly admits (albeit in a note in an unfinalized work) that he knows ‘not what’ a value is could be the fact that one cannot get behind all valuations in order to say what they are. To do so would be to take up a view beyond or hither from being, ‘outside’ of any world. For Nietzsche, *this* world is the only world. If values constitute that world then there is no perspective beyond values—only an abyss. Heidegger’s conviction that “[a]ny metaphysical thinking is onto-logy or it is nothing at all”⁵⁴ is his objection to will to power and the determination of being by value. We cannot speak of will to power and valuation ‘outside’ of being. Heidegger believes this is to speak of “nothing at all”—and hence his problem with Nietzsche’s philosophy of value as a determination of being.

Will to power seems to be the broad characterization of value: “Will to power and value positing are *the same*, insofar as the will to power looks toward the viewpoints of preservation and enhancement.”⁵⁵ But they cannot be entirely coextensive. Will to power is all pervasive, but valuing is a human phenomenon. This is clear from the entirety of Nietzsche’s corpus. ‘Values’ for him are always human values. Though, by ‘will’ Nietzsche does not mean the work of an agent, an entity. Ultimately there is no ‘willer’ behind the willed, there is only the willing. But by some analogy Nietzsche speaks of ‘perspectives’ of valuations. He refers to the ‘perspectives’ of drives, of competing forces, of quanta of power, perhaps. Unanswered is why human beings—even if themselves only the epiphenomena, by-products of power and forces—exclusively are disposed to nihilism, open to valuation. Whatever the pre-original origin of will to power and our valuations, Nietzsche clearly addresses the problem of value as a human problem. It is a mystery how distinct perspectives are had if everything is equally will to power (whatever be the ‘holders’ of such perspectives). In the plenum of power, how do different ‘quanta’ constitute different perspectives? How do entities of power delineate and beget human beings able to embrace concrete values? We require an explanation of how will to power manifests in valuations instead of regarding will to power and value as coextensive—as Heidegger does.⁵⁶ Heidegger admits, “The clarification of the essence of value and of valuation only yields a sketch of the will to power.”⁵⁷ But more clarification is needed to show *why we ought to embrace power* as a primary value—assuming we have an understanding of what this might look like. Wilcox’s proposition—a certain understanding of which Heidegger could very well accept—that will to power “needs no confirmation, because we all, in effect, accept it and must accept it

⁵³ Cf. Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 4*, 64. “Thus what is required for the real in its character as will to power are those values that establish its stability and continuance. But, just as necessarily, it requires the sort of conditions that guarantee an out-beyond-itself, a superelevation of what is real (what is living); it requires values as conditions of enhancement.” As such, “[values] are what they are—that is, they are conditions—only as *conditioning*, and they are therefore posited by the will to power itself as its own conditions of possibility,” 66.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche,” 55.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 4*, 68. Emphasis Heidegger’s.

⁵⁶ Ibid. “Will to power and value positing are *the same*, insofar as the will to power looks toward the viewpoints of preservation and enhancement. Thus valuation cannot be referred back to the will to power as something different from it.”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

—*if* his theory of the *will to power* is correct,"⁵⁸ is unhelpful in determining our own values because we have no idea what it is, concretely, to exercise this will to power; and, according to this logic, we always do exercise it. That is, what Wilcox proposes is that, though will to power is not susceptible to objective confirmation, *if* it is true, we already act according to it. But Nietzsche clearly intends something more in his ranking of noble and plebeian values. It is not enough for Nietzsche that everyone exercises a will to power. Many have done this, according to Nietzsche, in a deficient way. Will to power must mean something more particular if it is to concretely dictate our values, and this 'something more' must be grasped in our inquiry of value and will to power.

What looks like an alternate possible explanation only compounds the difficulty. Nietzsche offers a prospective genealogy of valuing.⁵⁹ It begins with promise-keeping. Promise-keeping requires the power to control, not only some external circumstances, but above all *oneself*. To keep a promise, the incipient subject must affirm itself, cultivate its own will and memory, and forge itself into a subject enduring over time.⁶⁰ Therefore it is promise-making which conditions the autonomous individual and its ability to affirm—first itself and then its promises.

The 'free' man, the possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will, also possesses his *measure of value* [...] just as he is bound to honour his peers, the strong and reliable [...] he is bound to reserve a kick for the feeble windbags who promise without the right to do so.⁶¹

Unclear is whether 'measure of value' implies the ability *to* value, or whether this just represents an early *instance* of that already manifest power. There is some evidence for both interpretations. Occasionally in this portion of *The Genealogy* Nietzsche speaks as though these promise-makers are akin to our present selves. For example, Nietzsche discusses the infliction of pain on the debtor by the creditor when debts are not repaid, promises not kept. He speaks of Egyptian defaulters trading the salvation of their souls for unrepaid debts.⁶² This implies that strong valuations—involving gods, souls and afterlives—are already in place with this early promise-making. However, promise-making appears the prime candidate in Nietzsche's works for an explanation of how will to power produces beings able to value. Nietzsche likely intended promise-making to be the advent of the enduring subject with protracted will and the ability to affirm; and he likely intended this to be the leap from bare will to power to will to power as affirmation of values. Furthermore, because Nietzsche is giving an account of the subject prior to valuation—and therefore prior to truth and reality (insofar as valuation is prior to these)—we cannot expect his account to be interpretable too literally. This is similar to Levinas' account of the Good prior to being and existence which cannot be 'true' in any objective, literal way.

To what end, then—aside from some already persistent value—could one begin to make promises in a quest for power? Whether one becomes a promise-maker in order to affirm oneself, or rather to respond to one's responsibility to the *debtor*; or thirdly if one becomes an

⁵⁸ Wilcox, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*, 196.

⁵⁹ An article by Diprose recalled my attention to these sections of *The Genealogy*. Cf. Stauffer and Bergho, eds., *Nietzsche and Levinas: After the Death of a Certain God*, 118-9.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* II, §1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, II, §2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, II, §5.

autonomous agent to emulate those other superior human specimens (other promise-keepers) one observes—which of these alternatives Nietzsche intends is not crucial at the moment.⁶³ Likewise will to power *itself*, as the power which animates human beings, could somehow seek an increase in power through *its*⁶⁴ manifestation of human beings able to value; but this would imply a particular account of will to power—the very account we are presently seeking—which would explain how value can be a product of will to power. We would need to explain what ‘will to *power*’ means such that values increase this power by the human activity of valuing. Regardless of which these explanations might supplement Nietzsche’s account of promise-making, it becomes a mystery how will to power and valuation are inaugurated so long as these always appeal to prior valuations. This difficulty is the reason Heidegger suggests that will to power conditions values which are their own condition—i.e., will to power conditions values which are in turn the condition of will to power. Here Heidegger would say that the will to power posits the world that the will to power acts in, and this involves ‘willing’ subjects able to make valuations. This still presents the same problem, namely how do human valuations come into existence and why? What really is the nature of these competing drives such that human beings and human valuations become manifest? How is the primordial will to power augmented by the presence of human valuation? And if will to power and value are the same as human valuation, and behind our valuations lie higher-order, but essentially similar valuations, what is the final status of will to power?

At the base of Nietzsche’s philosophy is an abyss—or at least something paradoxical. Regarding the world as will to power, it is a mystery how the dimension of value arises, how human beings come to value and why. Following Nietzsche, we began by asking about the force that invents value: we inquired into will to power to determine how the dimension of value opens to human beings, how the question of value arises for us at all. The status of will to power is still mysterious. Is it, too, a product of human valuation? Will to power seems to have a universal validity, yet cannot be objectively true. Moreover, assuming the validity of the so-called will to power (as more than *merely* another arbitrary human valuation on par with all others), it is a mystery how human beings able to exercise a power of valuation are manifest out of this general will to power. The answer to these questions is important if we are to determine, from the force that purportedly shapes value, what really ‘value’ is and how the dimension of value is open to human beings.

⁶³ The entire paragraph from which the previous quote is taken (see note 62) is an extended panegyric in which Nietzsche lauds the sovereign, autonomous, individual will (and Nietzsche even makes explicit that the terms ‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive). What is essential in this account of promise-making is not the other *to whom* one promises, but *oneself* and one’s “mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures” (Ibid.). However, Nietzsche concludes that man calls this “proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom [...] his *conscience*.” And discussing similar themes in *Human, all too Human*, Nietzsche says, “As a good man one belongs to the ‘good’, a community which has a sense of belonging together because all the individuals in it are combined with one another through the capacity for requital,” §45. A passage like this might lead one to believe that the sovereign individual does ‘owe’ such sovereignty to communal relations, and that therefore these relations are the origin of the possibility of human valuation.

⁶⁴ Cf. §10 of this essay. There is the ‘will’ and ‘will to power’ which human beings exercise, and the prior ‘metaphysical’ will to power that animates human beings and values themselves.

Levinas

7

Some answers concerning the origin of human valuation and the proper interpretation of will to power can be had by a comparison of the formal structure of Nietzsche's account of value with Levinas' account on the hither side of being, in the null-site or *abyss*. My proposition is that after the death of God both Nietzsche and Levinas posit value beyond or hither from being. Just as the Good is founded on the hither side of truth and being for Levinas, so does the measure and possibility for value, the will to power, for Nietzsche, lie hither from being insofar as will to power *itself posits the world of being*. The perspective 'beyond' good and evil is one of transcendence. The world is inseparable from good and evil; and hence will to power, the perspective beyond good and evil, is one from beyond being. After all, as Levinas says, and Nietzsche would certainly be compelled to agree, "[t]he ontological difference is preceded by the difference between good and evil. Difference itself is this latter; it is the origin of the meaningful."⁶⁵ What Levinas offers—amongst his finest accomplishments—is an ethical language, a means for speaking of the Good on the hither side of being and truth: that of which Nietzsche—*"knows not."*

Levinas—and most Levinas scholarship—is concerned with ethics and the Other. It is partly this fact that has distracted scholars from the vital connection between Levinas and Nietzsche. One takes Levinas to uncritically accept the supremacy of ethics and proceed from there. In some sense this is an accurate assessment; but in another sense it is inadequate. Levinas is still foremost a phenomenologist, a philosopher—and believes it to be of the utmost importance that we are not duped by morality. Like Nietzsche, despite engaging with matters outside the scope of objective truth, Levinas still holds his philosophy to appropriately rigorous standards. That something is valuable apart from the valuer makes no more sense to Levinas than it does to Nietzsche. Despite the role of a certain God in Levinas' philosophy, ethics as the highest good is not *only* accepted on the authority of a God, nor forcefully imposed on one through the bullying from, and dramatic suffering of, the Other. Ethics does not simply constitute the Good apart from one's finding it good. Though one can be mistaken (and the Good does not rely on *conscious* recognition of it as such), Levinas believes that proper phenomenological analysis yields the validity of the proposition—i.e., one *finds* responsibility to the Other to be the Good. Levinas does not begin with ethical behaviour, responsibility to the Other, and explain why it is Good. The implicit first question is about the Good—to which ethics is the answer, not the presupposition.

8

Levinas' philosophical exposition begins with a polemic against the preeminence of ontology in the thought of the West. This tradition, of which Heidegger (and to a similar degree perhaps

⁶⁵ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 182.

Hegel before him) is the culmination and consummation,⁶⁶ is a philosophy of power.⁶⁷ Ontology is an attempt at:

neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a *relation* with the other as such but the reduction of the other to the same. Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of an I. [...] Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power.⁶⁸

One might associate this with the Socratic turn identified by Nietzsche. Whatever their different estimations of the Western tradition, both Nietzsche and Levinas identify it with a drive to power through a domineering tendency of reason. The traditional, Socratic pursuit of objective knowledge, the Hegelian determination of knowledge as the ‘union of the knower and the known,’ and the ontology founded on these ideals, is not a position founded on a ‘higher’ objective truth, but on an aspiration for power.

For Levinas, an ontology is a view of reality as a homogenous sameness, where no essential distinction exists between the self and the Other; i.e., there is no genuine alterity within an ontology, no Other. Within an ontology, knowledge—which is an imperialistic assertion of oneself over externality—is taken as the ‘union of the knower and known,’ where this type of knowledge is attained by reducing everything to what it is *for-me*. Ontology leads to idealistic and subjectivist tendencies in which the world as a whole is taken to be a consequence of, and only of consequence to, the ego. Opposed to this tradition Levinas proposes a metaphysics, transcendence and radical alterity, at the base of experience. By ‘metaphysics’ Levinas intends a pluralistic interpretation of reality in which multiple, disparate components or dimensions are fundamental. These dimensions can be related only by asymmetrical relation, never by identity, union, nor the subsuming of one under the other. These dimensions for Levinas are the subject (or the Same) and the Other. Equiprimordial with the incipient self is the Other who is not subsumable into the totality of the same. An irreversible, asymmetric relation of transcendence is maintained between the self and the Other, and it is out of this fundamental *metaphysical* relation that being or ontology is possible.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 51.

⁶⁷ In one of Levinas’ explicit statements of this priority accorded to ontology, and its derivation from an authoritarian pursuit of power—that in the preface of *Totality and Infinity*—Nietzsche’s name is only mentioned once in a footnote, and not negatively. However, Heidegger’s name and philosophy is ever-present in these pages, as well as in the section of the same book entitled, ‘Metaphysics Precedes Ontology.’

⁶⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45-46.

⁶⁹ In contrast to this, Heidegger takes ‘metaphysics’ to be the Platonic philosophical tradition in which the question of *being* is ignored in the investigation of beings, where metaphysics, the ‘explanation’ of beings, turns into the identification of an eminent entity rather than being itself; but Heidegger believes ontology or the question of being is essentially absent in this tradition. Levinas believes that this same Platonic (or perhaps Parmenidean) tradition is always an ontology which seeks the unity of everything in the intelligibility of being. Even gods, divine realms and other subjects are taken to be intelligible extensions of this singular world. Nietzsche has something different in mind by ‘metaphysics’ than both Levinas and Heidegger. For Nietzsche, metaphysics is the positing of worlds beyond the corporeal world which would denigrate the latter. For Nietzsche, a metaphysical world—and the accompanying metaphysical philosophy—can be a Platonic realm of forms, a Christian afterlife or a Kantian noumenal realm, all of which are seen by Nietzsche as attempts to displace the importance of corporeal life by leaving the truth and value of it dependent on ‘higher’ or ‘truer’ realms.

The primordial self, 'prior' to its encounter with the Other, is the ego characterized by enjoyment. Levinas refers to the same ego by the terms 'psychism' and 'atheism'. By psychism Levinas means the separation of one's inner life, the self's resistance to totalization in being.⁷⁰ Atheism is this dimension of the psychic and the accomplishment of separation from totalization.⁷¹ That the self 'be' something apart from its election by the Other is important for Levinas' philosophy. It confers on the subject the autonomy needed to be considered a moral agent. On the other hand, the ego is only a thinking subject, a self (which implies a metaphysical dimension and not the ego which supports itself in a totality) when it has encountered the Other.⁷² The condition of the possibility of truth and falsity is the separation of the I, its 'distance' with respect to the Other and radical alterity.⁷³ To show the priority of ethics over ontology—the latter being favoured by a reverence for reason and objective truth—Levinas has to establish a primordial relation (and thereby also *separation*) between the self and the Other prior to being and truth. It is only thereby that the ethical relation will avoid assimilation into a totality, avoid devolving into an ontology. This is akin to Nietzsche putting truth within the scope of value—he does this to keep value outside of the scope of truth. Likewise, Levinas places his ethics prior to, outside the scope of, ontology.

The encounter with the Other is also the beginnings of language, which constitutes the relation between the same and Other.⁷⁴ The relation is "primordially enacted as conversation" where the the incipient self can engage with the Other without subsuming the Other in a totality. This relation with the Other, first enacted through conversation, is a calling into question of the ego by the Other; it is an accusation of the ego prior to any possibility of moral infraction. It is this call to responsibility from the Other that opens the ego up to an ethical dimension. The relation of the self to the Other is an ethical one.

The idea of infinity, the face, the Other, are essentially different descriptions of the same 'phenomenon'. The Other ruptures the egoistic totality, and thereby imparts to the self the idea of infinity—the Other *is* infinity within the self. Taking after Descartes, Levinas says the idea of infinity is in reflection always already within the developed self and cannot originate in the self after its creation, i.e., it cannot be conceived, discovered or intuited the way other ideas are. The idea of infinity is that which always overflows its own idea; the idea cannot contain its own object. The idea of infinity is not a philosophical idea if this means it is objective fact, yielded or proved by deduction. It is 'revealed' rather than known, and because it breaks up the totality it is the condition of externality and the correspondent possibility of truth. "The distance that

⁷⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 54.

⁷¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 58.

⁷² Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 27-8.

⁷³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 61. Levinas explains that separation of the self and the Other is the condition of the "quest for truth." 'Whole' beings, or those perduring in a totality do not seek truth because they are already always connected with the whole of being. The quest for truth (more fundamental than theorization, the sciences) is conditioned by a distance between the self and alterity which is not overcome in truth; truth is only ever a "lesser contact than tangency," (60) which is indicative of the separation which prevails between the self and alterity and which conditions truth.

⁷⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

separates *ideatum* and idea here constitutes the content of the *ideatum* itself."⁷⁵ Expressed otherwise, the Other becomes the 'idea' of alterity, the non-self, and externality, by which the self can direct itself outward and seek truth, engage in being. The idea of infinity is the revelation to the self of, or inhabitation of the self by, the Other.

The idea of infinity, expressed otherwise as a call to ethical responsibility, is not contentless but has the character of an accusation. In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas characterizes the unique subject as a being-persecuted⁷⁶—and it is in this way that the self is a unique subject, a self over and beyond a mere ego or non-human animal. This is important for Levinas in that it is as a guilty ego that the self originates. Before any philosophical analysis, the subject is guilty and ethically responsible. Subjectivity is a subjection to the infinite demands of the Other. Levinas describes the Other, insofar as it precedes and conditions being, as being beyond being, *otherwise than being* or beyond essence. He describes the self, in its 'psychical', 'atheistic' origin prior to being and a prospective ontology, as being *hither* from being. Roughly, being opens up *between* the self hither from being and the Other beyond being.⁷⁷

Levinas describes the self prior to being, and 'truths' about these pre-being origins, as a diachrony, as opposed to a synchrony. A synchrony is the character of a system, a *logos* and the ontological plain. That which exists in synchrony exists in universal, historical time, can be assembled into a whole and evaluated objectively. Opposed to this is a diachrony, a dispersed time which cannot be assembled into a present, cannot rejoin itself or be consolidated into a synchrony.⁷⁸ Levinas says of the diachrony that it, "prevents the one from joining up with itself and identifying itself as a substance, contemporary with itself, like a transcendental ego."⁷⁹ The diachrony is the 'time' before the present, before the self (properly so called), before being. The diachrony is a constructive way of speaking of that which lies behind all objectivity, truth and being—namely the transcendental self and ethics. Levinas characterizes the term 'diachrony' in manifold ways. He speaks of it alternately as a truth which cannot be synthesized, a disorder prior to all order.⁸⁰ Elsewhere, as in Levinas' equation of the diachronic, pre-being self with

⁷⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 49.

⁷⁶ Cf. Silvia Benso, "Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?" in Stauffer and Bergo, *Nietzsche and Levinas*. Benso tries to defend Levinas against the charge that he founds a morality of *ressentiment*. Levinas is simply inconsistent, and much like Nietzsche exhibits many different approaches to the same problems in different works. Levinas looks more or less like an 'ascetic priest' depending on which of his works one focuses on.

⁷⁷ Levinas probably has Heidegger's notion of 'being' in mind here. Being for Levinas is the sort of intelligibility that is had with an understanding subject. Hence, being only opens up after the self's encounter with the Other when it can seek truth and be directed in such a way that it could 'uncover' beings. The 'ego' prior to this (which is accused by the Other) is not a 'being' because this label implies the intelligibility that is only afforded to me after my encounter with the Other. This ego seems to be 'hither' from being in that it is prior, closer, to my origin than is being. The Other seems to be 'beyond' (as opposed to 'hither' from) being insofar as, not coming from within the totality of the ego, but from 'outside' this totality, the Other breaks through that totality and opens up the possibility of being. It is only in this world that spatiality is had, and only in such a spatial world that the terms 'hither' and 'beyond' have literal significance. Levinas might have to say that the pre-being ego and the Other are themselves in different realms, but both outside being. This seems to be the distinction between the 'hither' and the 'beyond'. But insofar as neither of these are intelligible spatially, and insofar as they precede the conditions of intelligibility are not *literally* intelligible at all, the specific choice of these terms cannot be too heavily assessed.

⁷⁸ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 38.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁰ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 166, fn. 18.

(presumably Kant's) transcendental ego, one has the impression that the diachrony represents the self whose reflexive thought does not quite join up to the self that had 'directed' that thought. It is the 'I' before it meets back up with itself and *identifies* (in the dual sense of this word) itself in a synchrony. It is this sense of 'before' that Levinas says the diachrony is a past more ancient than any historical past, an immemorial past which was never present. However, whatever visual or verbal representation is used, it never adequately describes the diachrony. Whatever means of thematization are used, they shroud what is really intended by the term 'diachrony' insofar as thematization itself is antithetical to—or rather presupposes the irrecoverability of—the diachrony itself. The diachrony—like the transcendental ego which lies behind every attempt to identify the self, yet resists identification—lies behind all thought and truth, but is thereby not identifiable in these things. Given this character of the diachrony, it is apt for speaking of values or ethics as that which conditions all truth but which thereby cannot be disclosed by truth.

One last locution in Levinas' repertoire is his distinction between the saying and the said. The saying is original proximity and relation to the Other. The 'saying' is a signification of the responsibility to the Other that occurs in proximity.⁸¹ Alternately, the saying is the exposure of the self to the accusations and demands of the Other.⁸² The saying can be thematized in communicative language, in a 'said'. Hence there is always a discrepancy between the saying and the said, just as a diachrony is never adequately grasped in synchronic truth. Part of the challenge of Levinas' philosophy is attempting to communicate through the said—the only way of *dia-logical*⁸³ communication—the pre-original saying which makes possible the said.⁸⁴ This is Levinas' attempt to find a way to properly speak of ethics that does justice to its priority over ontology. Again, it is this ethical or axiological language that can prove useful to Nietzsche.

The *real*, experiential, basis for Levinas' discourse on infinity and a beyond-being, is what Levinas calls the trace and describes differently in terms of Desire. Prior to the said is a saying, that primordial connection that makes language possible; and prior to the possibility of intentionality, philosophy and knowledge, is Desire. Levinas describes Desire as "the need of him who lacks nothing, the aspiration of him who possesses his being entirely, who goes beyond his plenitude, who has the idea of Infinity."⁸⁵ It is only with this impulse of Desire, a 'pre-knowing knowledge' that there is something outside of oneself to be known, that truth and knowledge can be sought. Husserl's intentionality implies a preceding hunger,⁸⁶ a need without object, not founded in a privation of the self—Desire. Desire is what makes us human subjects. The I which "purges itself interminably" of its egocentrism and incurs "a responsibility increasing in the measure that it is assumed"—this responsibility "is termed goodness. Perhaps the possibility of a point of the universe where such an overflow of responsibility is produced

⁸¹ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 46.

⁸² Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 50.

⁸³ Cf. Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics* (New York: Fordham UP, 2001), 3. Dudiak is concerned with the nature of dialogue given that it is communication between metaphysically separated entities but implies enough commonality for some interaction to be feasible.

⁸⁴ Cf. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 7. This is actually *the* task of philosophy.

⁸⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 103.

⁸⁶ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 66.

ultimately defines the I."⁸⁷ It is this that makes Desire the analogue of will to power.⁸⁸ Both are that principle which make human beings the type of being to seek value and worth. Both Nietzsche and Levinas answer the question of value with a principle that animates the human self in this way; the animating principle which opens the dimension of 'value' to human beings.

For Desire this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning. It is understood as the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High. The very dimension of height is opened up by metaphysical Desire. That this height is no longer the heavens⁸⁹ but the Invisible is the very elevation of height and its nobility.⁹⁰

What Levinas describes is that which animates the self. It is the Other, which is beyond being, which comes into proximity to the ego, breaks apart its totality and introduces it to a world of being—a transcendent world insofar as this incipient subject is on the hither side of being. After implying that the dimension of metaphysics is the quiddity of a human being, Levinas says of Desire that, "To die for the invisible—" the transcendent Other, "this is metaphysics."

9

Levinas begins 'Humanism and An-Archy' by noting how the "unburied dead in wars and extermination camps"⁹¹ render illusory the conception of man as privileged in the universe—man who is himself of value for being the 'measure of all things,' including value. It is not hard to conceive of these statements as a reinterpretation of Nietzsche's proposed, 'quasi-empirical' fact.

Without the myth that man is the center and *telos* of the universe we run the risk of reduction to the opposite extreme at which the self is not unimportant, but not an entity at all. It is regarded as a convergence of "impulses, influences, and a language, which compose a mask called a person, no one, or at best a personage of purely empirical consistency."⁹² In this view a person is an empirical nothing.⁹³ Levinas of course refers to the non-being of the transcendental ego, which elsewhere he says is akin to the diachrony of the subject,⁹⁴ the 'identity' of which is

⁸⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 244-5.

⁸⁸ For Levinas, 'will' derives from the ego and is an aspect of the psychism (*Totality and Infinity*, 59), without this being construed as *inherently* negative. Levinas seems to think that the 'will'—associated generally with need—is a sort of presupposition (for its association with separation) of ethical beings. Hence Levinas says the, "will is free to assume [ethical] responsibility in whatever sense it likes" (218); and in adherence to ethical responsibility (when the will determines to 'make good' on this responsibility), the will "dissolves" into Desire. This Desire no longer "defends the powers of a will, but, as the goodness whose meaning death cannot efface, has its center outside of itself" (236). The will, turned outward toward alterity (as opposed to its inward direction in egocentricity) in this way, dissolves into Desire. There is no precise analogue of Levinas' sense of 'will' in Nietzsche's philosophy.

⁸⁹ Even—or *especially*—a writer so religiously inspired as Levinas believes in the death of a certain onto-theological God.

⁹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34-5.

⁹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "Humanism and An-Archy," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 127.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹³ Nietzsche rejects the reality of the subject (understood roughly as a Cartesian ego) under similar considerations. Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §16, §54.

⁹⁴ See page 22 of this essay.

constituted by its *lack* of identity.⁹⁵ Levinas seeks meaning in this 'transcendental ego' nonetheless:

Can we not find this meaning without being thereby brought back to the 'being of entities,' system, and matter? It would be a question of a new concept of passivity, of a passivity more radical than that of an effect in a causal series, on the hither side of consciousness and knowing, but also on the hither side of the inertia of things which rest on themselves as substances and oppose their nature, a material cause, to all activity. This passivity would refer to the *reverse side* of being, prior to the ontological plane in which being is posited as *nature*; it would refer to the antecedence, without any outside yet, of creation, the meta-physical antecedence.⁹⁶

Before being a *being*, before being an active, free autonomous ego with the capacity for choice, the self is an ultimate passivity. It is only with the encounter of the Other, the revelation of the idea of infinity, and the imbuing of the self with Desire, that the self becomes a being. On this account, however, the revelation of the Other, being a persecution and demand, constitutes the self as Desire and as responsibility to the Other. Before any choice the self is ethically accountable to the Other.

Levinas describes this passivity, this pre-original responsibility to the other as the Good. It is a value, a goodness beyond (or hither from) being which elects us.⁹⁷ For Levinas we cannot reject this Good because it constitutes us in a pre-original way. It constitutes my transcendental ego—something prior to any real notion of choice.

Considered as a being, the self is rendered meaningless by death if the self is measured by being. By the measure of being the self and its deeds become finite and insignificant. In parallel fashion, nihilism has resulted from an affirmation of objective knowledge—which Levinas sees as coextensive with the ontological paradigm of philosophy—as the highest value. But the pre-original responsibility for the other is not measured by being, is not preceded by a decision, and death cannot reduce it to absurdity.⁹⁸ The value of the self is not measured by being but is made possible by its pre-being constitution from the Good, its (actual, empirical) service to the Other, its willingness even to die for the Other. Again, this is akin to Nietzsche's salvaging value from the scope of truth. But Levinas has not displaced value to another world or an other-world. The only value and responsibility to the Other Levinas ultimately cares about is embodied, lived experienced. I am compelled to pursue the Good and fulfill my ethical obligations in *this* life. It is rather that the measure of such value is found 'elsewhere' than in being—in the null-site, the abyss. Nietzsche, the original, modern proponent of natural, human, earthly values does the same thing. In asking about value and the measure of value he asks about the force that shapes the world of values. Will to power serves an analogous function in his philosophy as Desire and responsibility do for Levinas. Will to power shapes being, values, and effectively truth. But this does not mean that Nietzsche seeks the value of the self outside being. It means that there is something 'higher'—or perhaps lower, hypo-physical, subterranean, below even our deepest

⁹⁵ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 56-7.

⁹⁶ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 132.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

instincts—which shapes the world of value; and it is thereby that we have our *measure* of value. Likewise for Levinas.⁹⁹

Levinas' account of value is 'objective' in that it is not simply a matter of human whim and arbitration. The Good which I am elected by, that from which Desire effectively originates and to which it aspires, is so far beyond a matter of human choice that it is inscribed prior to any possibility of choice. This leads to Richard A. Cohen's supposition that good and evil are absolute, that God sanctions the good and forbids evil *because of the nature* of these things as good or evil.¹⁰⁰ If ethics is primary in the way Levinas indicates, one might wonder, how could human assent or disposition have any bearing on its determination? However, Desire is closer to a Nietzschean principle of affirmation than one might expect.

In a 1970 lecture at Loyola University, Levinas says, "[h]uman meaning [...] is always a relation between a desire and a value in an ambiguity. *One can say equally well that desire confers value or that value elicits desire.*"¹⁰¹ This passage—delivered quite subtly and inconspicuously—is quite remarkable. It answers a version of the question that Socrates poses to Euthyphro: does the gods' approval make an action pious, or does its being pious elicit the gods' approval?¹⁰² Is the good such because it is valued or is it valued because it is good? This is a question Nietzsche grapples with. Having his polemic against the Judeo-Christian paradigm firmly in focus, Nietzsche's unequivocal answer is that valuing precedes value: what is valuable is so *because* it is valued by human beings. Nietzsche is clear about the one-way relationship, the lack of ambiguity. One problem with this is that he cannot explain why we value to begin with. For him there could be no prior value to elicit our affirmation and so Nietzsche is at a loss to explain how will to power amounts to values and a human-projected world. We are left with the Heideggerian explanation that all values are conditions of their own condition. Levinas, alternately, suggests that the relationship between value and valuing is ambiguous. It makes no sense to speak of value abstracted from any valuation, but nor can we speak of valuation abstracted from anything that is valuable. Each assumes the other. *The ability to affirm* (in its special meaning for Levinas), *opens up to us congruously with, without difference from, the constitution of value itself.* We value, *Desire*, because of our constitution out of the Good, the self-Other relation, the revelation of the idea of infinity. We search for value insofar as it is 'revealed' to us through the idea of infinity—ethical responsibility elicits an affirmation of its goodness; but responsibility to the Other is valuable only insofar as we affirm or recognize (*Desire*) this Good and the value inherent in this responsibility. The Good is such because we *Desire* it and

⁹⁹ This account of value is derived from the mentioned essay in particular. Levinas offers several, incompatible accounts of value and the Good throughout his corpus, and these become less compatible when one considers them in relation to evil. Compare, for example, "Humanism and An-Archy" with "Transcendence and Evil." The former suggests that, unequivocally, the Good is the original value without anti-value, and that evil comes afterward, not as the twin of the Good but below it (136-8). In the latter, however, Levinas seems to suggest that the Good arises in my indignation at, and subsequent desire to remedy, the suffering of the Other—evil.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Richard A. Cohen, *Levinasian Meditations* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2010), 221: "Murder is not evil because the angel or because God forbids it; it is evil, and thus God forbids it." If God does not determine good and evil then certainly human beings exercise no power in these determinations.

¹⁰¹ Levinas, "The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value and the Prospects for Humanism," in *Value and Values in Evolution* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1979), 181. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰² Plato, "Euthyphro," in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 10a.

find it to be good.¹⁰³ We are not abandoned to the idea that nothing is valuable (nihilism) or that all valuations are opinions (a crude rendition of Nietzsche as a relativist); but nor must we resort to the unintelligible idea that there are values outside the possibility and presence of valuation (absolute values).¹⁰⁴

Levinas' intentional conflation of Desire (valuation) and value in this passage explains why for Levinas value is absolute—even God does not determine it, Cohen points out—but is yet something personal: one does not demand that the Other be responsible to oneself, but is oneself alone responsible to the Other. This fact derives from the inextricability of value from Desire (or affirmation). Value is something not 'conditioned' by the subject, yet identified with subjective affirmation and inseparable from Desire. Value is not absolute in a pejorative sense, not handed down to us from an alien God in an inaccessible realm. The alterity which his account of value appeals to is not a traditional divinity but a phenomenological reality—the apex of reality (or exteriority) insofar as a mere idea cannot contain the reality of the Other. Further, despite his discussion of the hither side of being, the beyond essence, Levinas does not appeal to an afterlife or other-world that would devalue corporeal life,¹⁰⁵ nor any sort of salvation: one's reward for shouldering the burden of responsibility to the Other, Levinas is clear, is only an ever greater responsibility. Value—Desire, responsibility—is never satisfied, complete, earned, attained. It requires constant vigilance and work where the only reward is that responsibility itself, value instantiated in and for this life. Much of this account preserves what is appealing about Nietzsche's, those aspects which promise to deliver value from nihilism. Unlike in the case of Nietzsche however, we are not left wondering about the miraculous genesis of our ability to value. By equating valuation with value, recognizing the ambiguity between (or identity of) Desire and value, and giving an account of Desire on the hither side of being, Levinas is able to also give an account of how we are valuing beings, how the dimension of value is open to us.

10

Levinas offers an original account of value, one that makes up for many of the problems encountered in Nietzsche concerning value. One advantage of Levinas' is that it offers a much more determinate account of how the dimension of value arises for human beings. The answer is Desire, which posits an inherent longing or aspiration in the subject. The possibility of value comes from an unfulfillable obligation and responsibility—a willingness to 'die for the invisible,' as Levinas dramatically phrases it. Though not entirely clear what one does to pursue the Good and fulfill one's unfulfillable obligation to the Other, its being an obligation to the

¹⁰³ Cf. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 57. Levinas claims, paradoxically perhaps, that the violence with which responsibility is thrust upon the self is 'counterbalanced' by the goodness of Good-ness.

¹⁰⁴ Another advantage of this conception of desire conferring value and value eliciting desire is that one is not necessarily in the awkward position of having truth at one's disposal solely insofar as one values truth. Truth, in a way, maintains its own ground, without necessarily leading to nihilism and the pitfalls of traditional, absolute values.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Stauffer and Bergo, *Nietzsche and Levinas*, 167. Cohen keenly notes that Nietzsche and Levinas present such a potent challenge to one another (though I believe them to be more compatible than Cohen does) because they meet on the terrain of corporeality, the living body. They both begin with embodiment and sensibility (in their respective ways) rather than with abstract models of the self and reality.

Other already constitutes more content than is accompanied by will to power.¹⁰⁶ Given that everyone seems to be ultimately dictated by a will to power for Nietzsche it is difficult to know how one ought to pursue it. Different valuations yield radically different interpretations regarding what manifest power looks like. Unlike Nietzsche's empty account of affirmation of value as will to power, a more determinate content comes attached to Levinas' conception of affirmation as Desire.

What is interesting in the comparison is that Levinasian language of the diachrony and the hither side of being and truth can be used to formulate a conception of will to power lacking in Nietzsche. Will to power is all-encompassing, yet cannot be objectively true. Any attempt to formulate it is problematic because we owe the possibility of its formulation to the will to power itself. It is 'unsaid' whenever one tries to express it properly; i.e., even the interpretation of the will to power is explainable only in terms of a will to power. Levinas provides a way to speak of such theories—'metaphysical' or transcendental theories—without appealing to objective truth and ontologies, but also without evoking 'worlds behind the scenes,'¹⁰⁷ as Levinas says. We could speak equally of will to power as a diachrony, the validity of which could never be established in philosophy, in an ontology and rigidly defined, objective truth. Yet we could say that a 'trace' of this pre-being will to power is found in each of us, beneath all of our worldly values, actions and willing.

For Levinas, responsibility is prior to any choice, prior to the self, truth and being; yet 'traces' of this infinity are found in Desire. One acting ethically in accordance with one's election prior to being must be ethically responsible for others, where this latter sense of responsibility must be the same as the 'pre-being' responsibility insofar as it originates there; but the real life responsibility must be distinct in that this responsibility is the type to be affirmed and pursued in *life*—it becomes existent, a fact of being or beings. This is akin to the dilemma of speaking of will to power which is exercised through us but always, in effect, 'prior' to us, versus the will to power and values that we really enact. Of course they are intimately connected, but can only be identified by analogy. That Nietzsche speaks of 'will' in this twofold way is evidenced by his pervasive claim about the irreducibility and all-determinative power of the will to power. Nietzsche asks, "Is 'will to power' a *kind* of 'will' or identical with the concept 'will'?"¹⁰⁸ And his response implies the latter. This is also Heidegger's thesis. So will to power is irreducible and all-encompassing; but elsewhere Nietzsche speaks of the human will as, "above all, something

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 218-9. "The will is free to assume this responsibility in whatever sense it likes; it is not free to refuse this responsibility itself." This responsibility might be viewed as a sort of necessary 'disposition' one must embody, but it has content insofar as it demands responsibility and forbids murder and the affliction of harm (however broadly construed). The responsibility itself cannot be 'willed away,' of course, because this responsibility is the condition and character of the will, just like 'power' is the character of the human will for Nietzsche. But 'thou shalt not commit murder' already provides a clearer sense of what is encompassed by responsibility than is given in Nietzsche's concept of power.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 8: "From Plato's One without being to Husserl's pure Ego, transcendent in immanence, it [philosophy] has known the metaphysical extraction from being, even if, betrayed by the said, as by the effect of an oracle, the exception restored to the essence and to fate immediately fell back into the rules and led only to worlds behind the scenes. The Nietzschean man above all was such a moment." A proper discussion of value (and especially ethics in Levinas' case) has to thoroughly abstract or 'extract' from the *logos* which Nietzsche claimed is Socrates' legacy. This passage perhaps more than any other in Levinas' work is revealing of the affinity between the two philosophers, and shows how they relate distinctly from the way Levinas relates to, for example, Kant.

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §692

complicated, something unified only in a word [...] Let us say: in every act of willing there is, to begin with, a plurality of feelings [...]”¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche disparages the myth of the simple, efficacious human will.¹¹⁰ But these are two difference senses of the single term. The difference between will prior to being and within being is analogous to the difference implicit between the responsibility which elects me on the hither side of being and that responsibility I exercise toward others within being.

We can draw the similarity between the two even closer. If for Nietzsche the world is inseparable from valuation, if will to power posits the world (and given that *the* world is the only world for Nietzsche, if will to power determines values which determine the world, then will to power must be beyond being)—this is compatible with the claim that the world *elicits* value even before the world comes into being. Is this not what Heidegger means when he says that will to power posits value which is itself the condition for will to power? Is this not a remote statement of Levinas’ claim that value elicits Desire and, ambiguously, desire confers value? Perhaps Nietzsche unbeknownst to himself—perhaps the context of his writing was simply too different—implies, along with the determination of value by valuation, the elicitation of valuing by value.¹¹¹

The real similarity of the two accounts lies in the fact that both find an ineffable principle of value beyond or hither from being and truth; and this null, abyssal principle informs human values and valuing.

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §127. Cf. Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Ignoring the twofold sense in which Nietzsche intends the word ‘will’, Clark offers an account of will to power and suggests that Nietzsche fatuously offers a hypothetical proof (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §36) with no meaningful import whatsoever. Clark interprets the passage according to the physio-psychological sense of the term ‘will’ and then deduces that Nietzsche must be jesting because he clearly rejects the concept elsewhere (Clark, 214-8).

¹¹¹ An even stronger thesis is that the two accounts of value, beyond formal structure, are compatible in content. For Nietzsche, will to power is strength of will, coextensive with *willing* itself. He does not say specifically what one does to will power; and what this would be in a particular scenario would depend on previously established values. On the other hand, Levinas establishes Desire, the idea of infinity, as the beginning of activity (as opposed to passivity), the pursuit of Desire. Could one serve the Other while willing power and will power insofar as one serves the Other?

The Invisible

11

To the extent that Levinas' account of value is a re-interpretation of Nietzsche's, it is also improved by Levinas' innovations. Heeding the death of God and taking Nietzsche's critique of morality seriously, Levinas develops an idea of value from the abyss, the null-site beyond being. Especially *Otherwise than Being* goes great lengths to render ethical-language possible, to develop a way of speaking of the beyond-being, beyond the good and evil of onto-theology; a way of speaking, as Nietzsche says, of the "force that forms, simplifies, shapes, invents" and gives birth to value insofar as this must be beyond being. Perhaps no one has carried Nietzsche's own task further than Levinas. Perhaps as the Nietzschean man is above all others an attempt at metaphysical extraction from being, so is the Levinasian man, above all others, the attempt at a philosophy beyond good and evil insofar as these are the fundamental categories.

Cohen, as the champion of Levinas,¹¹² protests his association with Nietzsche; but the foregoing analysis attests to the affinity between the two. One discrepancy between the two accounts, however, even on a formal level, is that Desire is articulated in ways that will to power is not. I am not spontaneously elected by the Good, but the Other imposes the idea of infinity on me. The pre-being, pre-origin origin of the self as Desire is quite complex. It is not the homogenous, ubiquitous will to power that spontaneously coheres into beings able to value—such as the promise-makers. Levinas' account of Desire relies on the transcendent Other, often portrayed as a divinity. Diprose suggests that Nietzschean responsibility to the self can be interpreted as deriving from a responsibility to Others as seen in Nietzsche's account of promise-making.¹¹³ But the two accounts of value cannot be conflated to this extremity. Whatever Nietzsche intended by his genealogy of the origin of promise-making, it was not the radical alterity of an Other and the self who expiates for the Other's accusations. For Nietzsche, promise-making is a symbol of one's own strength of will, where one keeps promises merely for the superiority attributed to one in doing so. Promise-making has nothing whatsoever to do with others, radically or relatively other, but only with the promise-maker's egoistic ambitions.¹¹⁴ For now the event through which human beings capable of valuation arise out of will to power will have to remain a mystery. Creative work would have to be done to show how—if it *could* be shown—human valuation and will arise out of the grandiose, metaphysical will to power; and one would have to go beyond Nietzsche's writing to proffer this account. This is something that

¹¹² See my forthcoming review of Cohen's book, *Levinasian Meditations* in *Symposium* 15.2 (Fall 2011) <<http://www.scop.org/en/2011/01/19/richard-a-cohen-levinasian-meditations.html>>. Cf. Cohen, *Levinasian Meditations*, 172. In that book Cohen says that, since his time as a student, for him, "Levinas was already *the* philosopher, the one whose philosophy was *truth*."

¹¹³ Rosalyn Diprose, "Nietzsche, Levinas, and the Meaning of Responsibility" in *Nietzsche and Levinas*.

¹¹⁴ Will to power is generally portrayed by Nietzsche as a universal force acting within the plenum of power. On one interpretation, one might think that interactions between 'distinct' human beings are actually reflexive interactions on the part of this single, greater force—merely interactions of the will to power with itself, the whole rotating on itself. It is difficult to see how this whole could increase in power, but this conception is also not directly compatible with the idea that each human being wills its own power to the exclusion of others. We have to maintain the distinction between the universal will to power and that will to power which is somehow manifest in individual human beings to make sense of this.

Levinas alone gives an in-depth account of concerning the origin of the Desiring subject out of its pre-origin origin on the hither side of being.

Returning to Cohen's objections, I have not proposed serious reinterpretations of Levinas yet, and have not altered his account of value—except in tarnishing its ethically-pristine figure by associating it with Nietzsche. Primarily I have only engaged in a reinterpretation of Nietzsche with Levinasian insights, merely pointing out where Levinas seems to have Nietzschean critiques of traditional morality in mind. Alternately, will it be objected that I have reduced Nietzsche's philosophy to one of *ressentiment*, to a dogmatic and foolish faith in an other-world and deprecation of our own? It is possible that to explain human valuation out of will to power in the manner I have alluded to would require a metaphysical account analogous to Levinas' account of the transcendent Other—and this might be more than a properly Nietzschean account of value could endure.

The test is whether a table of value is founded on rancour and indignation, whether the long-term bearing of these values degenerates into nihilism; essentially: whether we can happily and *healthily* (which might mean potently—*autocratically*) live with them.¹¹⁵ Nietzsche's focus on natural, earthly values and power need not disappear in the application of Levinasian insights. *Practically* nothing need change except our conceptualization of it which, arguably, has no bearing on Nietzsche's *actual* philosophy insofar as the ultimate consequence of a philosophy is action and pursuit of a goal.¹¹⁶ An account of value beyond being is always only analogy—only a certain 'obtuseness of vision' takes it literally as a representational account.¹¹⁷ The reality of this action and goal need not change with the recognition of a beyond-being—something that is not even *nothing*—in the way of Levinas. Levinas' beyond-being is a dimension that is characterized by neither being nor non-being, a domain which does not usurp the *reality* of corporeal existence, nor a domain that relies on subjective belief or mendaciousness to make its principles valid (because the diachrony and the Desire-conferred Good have some non-subjective validity). We can think of the beyond-being by analogy to imaginary numbers in mathematics.¹¹⁸ There are no pretensions that these numbers refer to real quantities, and yet they become valuable tools in solving some equations and can indeed be explained positively by mathematics. They are not 'real', yet neither purely fanciful. Likewise the beyond-being embraced by Levinas is not arbitrary—even if it is not thereby objective. The world and being are left intact and accorded an even greater worth. We might also take this recognition of the metaphorical character of explanations of the beyond-being as an excuse for Nietzsche's not having one in favour of will to power. If any such explanation of the birth of value from will to

¹¹⁵ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Untimely Meditations* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010), 187. "The only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves something, namely trying to see whether one can live in accordance with it [...]"

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, 163.

¹¹⁷ 'Obtuseness of vision,' is of course Nietzsche's phrase, but can be taken as a statement of Levinas' claim that the said never properly conveys the saying.

¹¹⁸ An example of an imaginary number is the square root of a negative number. A square root represents a number which, when multiplied by itself, becomes the number underneath the root sign (e.g. $\sqrt{4} = 2$, where $2 \times 2 = 4$). An example of an imaginary number is then $\sqrt{-4}$. There is no number x which when multiplied by itself equals -4 (any number multiplied by itself is always positive); and as such $\sqrt{-4}$ is an *imaginary* number.

power is inevitably only metaphor or analogy—despite its real validity—why not be contented with a lack of precise explanation?

On the other hand, perhaps the problem is faith and Nietzsche's account of value cannot endure the introduction of faith into it. Levinas' own attitudes to faith are varied, and he seems to intend different things by the term at different times. Sometimes Levinas seems to want to distance his philosophy from faith, claiming that the an-archy transcends even the categories of faith and non-faith which still have a foot in essence and ontology.¹¹⁹ Levinas is also not embracing faith to the *exclusion* of 'down to Earth,' reasonable philosophy. However, elsewhere Levinas says things like, "An interlocutor is not affirmed like a truth, but believed. This faith or trust does not designate here a second source of cognition, but is presupposed by every theoretical statement."¹²⁰ Here faith is primary, and philosophy owes everything to it. This is not so distant from Nietzsche's recognition that truth is always founded on untruth—a faith. Nietzsche sums up a Christian attitude: "In short: 'I have faith that faith makes blessed;—consequently it is true.'"¹²¹ Nietzsche is here focused on his polemic against Christianity—and as such his statement sounds reproaching; but he ultimately recognizes the inevitability of this 'faith' behind all truth. "The only way to refute priests and religions is this: to show that their errors have ceased to be beneficial—that they rather do harm; in short, that their own 'proof of power' no longer holds good—"¹²² But Nietzsche admits, "In fact, it makes a difference why you are lying: whether you are lying in order to sustain or to destroy."¹²³ And one can inquire into the difference between faith and *affirmation*, the former which Nietzsche so often rebukes and the latter which he lauds. Is not the only difference the intent and disposition with which one confronts one's own faith—or lie? Is not the dearth of value in the 'objective' world the requirement that one 'esteem' it and thereby make it valuable? Is this not what justifies the lie of the interpretation-affirmed-as-true *will to power* and all other values for Nietzsche?

But Levinas could also meet Nietzsche halfway concerning faith. Though Levinas has more reverence for faith in its traditional, religious instantiation¹²⁴ than does Nietzsche, Levinas' ethics is *not founded* on faith. Whatever terms Levinas employs to explain his ethics, whatever metaphysics he invokes to animate his values—his discourse on transcendence and God, the infinite, diachrony and Desire—his ethics is founded on the responsibility one has toward the flesh and blood human being before oneself. Whatever transcendent, infinite, godly notions Levinas attaches to the 'face', it is not for these qualities that it is ethically significant. In the end one puts away one's books and helps his neighbour—where this precludes ethics being a matter of obedience to an impersonal 'law' or metaphysical principle. Likewise, Nietzsche does not care about 'philosophy'. Nietzsche's future philosopher—which would not be recognizable in the Socratic archetype of a philosopher—is a commander, creator and legislator.¹²⁵ Effectively for both Nietzsche and Levinas one writes books about good and evil and prudently engages in

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 168.

¹²⁰ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 41.

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §50.

¹²² Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §157.

¹²³ Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §58.

¹²⁴ Levinas' attitude towards religion is favourable where religion is seen as a proper expression of an ethical disposition, but negative where religion becomes 'onto-theology' and reverence directed toward an ontological god.

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §211.

philosophical studies for a period—but what ultimately matters is the corporeal world and one's engagement in and with it. For Nietzsche, ultimately 'faith' is inevitable; and for Levinas faith is not ultimate.

Having abstracted from the positive content of Levinas' beyond-being, having not claimed affirmation to be founded on guilt and servitude, there is nothing *inherently* contrary to Nietzsche's philosophy in the idea of an otherwise than being. Instead Nietzsche's philosophy can be clarified by means of a value-shaping force, the *measure* of value, beyond being.

12

One ought to wonder what the significance of the formal similarity is. For both Nietzsche and Levinas the measure and possibility of value lie in a null-site or abyss beyond being. For both, a proper analysis of value yields a trace of something anterior to truth. What does it mean that a discussion of value after the death of God provokes the judgment that something's unthinkability is no argument against its validity in philosophical discourse?¹²⁶ What does it mean that values condition themselves, that we are oriented toward the invisible, that philosophy is about discovering the pre-origin of origins,¹²⁷ the cave behind caves, the background philosophy behind every foreground philosophy, the diachrony in obscurity behind the synchrony, and the saying behind the said?¹²⁸ And knowing the similar ways in which Nietzsche and Levinas pose and confront the question of value, is there a way to adjudicate between Desire and the will to power? Given a vague, formal understanding of what the origin of value looks like, can we finally say what *is* of value? Is beneath a self-righteous responsibility to the Other an egoistic will to power? Or is responsibility—regarded in Nietzsche as responsibility to the self and affirmation of life—actually derivative of the relation with the Other and from promise-making which has responsibility to the Other as its object? Or does this responsibility in the form of promise-making still ultimately derive from a will to power, where one keeps one's promises to others only to prove the superiority of one's will? Is there the possibility of adjudication here, or has something susceptible to 'adjudication', objective assessment, disappeared? Bergo suggests that, insofar as Nietzsche and Levinas delve into the conditions of sensibility and subjectivity, the 'truth' of the matter is, by that fact, undecidable.¹²⁹ Having pursued value all the way to the null-site and abyss, beyond the ontological plane and being, beyond all the conditions of truth, essence, and to the origin of origins—objectivity is long gone as a determination of validity.

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §436. "That thinking is a measure of actuality—that what cannot be thought, *is not*—is a rude *non plus ultra* of a moralistic trustfulness (in an essential truth-principle at the bottom of things), in itself a mad assumption, which experience contradicts every moment. We are altogether unable to think anything at all just as it *is* —" Of course, Nietzsche does not have a Levinasian vocabulary at his disposal to speak of that which is otherwise than being.

¹²⁷ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 65.

¹²⁸ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 7, 44.

¹²⁹ Cf. Stauffer and Bergo, *Nietzsche and Levinas: After the Death of a Certain God*, 112.

Beyond the context of Levinas, Desire can be taken as a description of the human aspiration to value.¹³⁰ Infinity “hollows out a desire which cannot be filled, nourishes itself with its very augmentation [...] It is a desire that is beyond satisfaction, and, unlike a need, *does not identify a term or an end*. This endless desire for what is beyond being is *dis-interestedness*, transcendence—desire for the Good.”¹³¹ The object of Desire is invisible, which is actually to say undefined. It is the Other, where we cannot—though Levinas tries—assume this ‘Other’ to be the human other or neighbour. This is why Nietzsche, beyond an abstract definition of will as a power which seeks more power, does not offer a real definition of what one does *in order to exercise a maximum of power* (and hence Nietzsche never arrives at a concrete definition of ‘will’ or ‘power’¹³²). Its object is invisible. Likewise for Levinas, Desire is directed toward the invisible. Levinas continues:

The desirable [the Good] is intangible and separates itself from the relationship with desire which it calls for; through this separation or holiness it remains a third person, the *he* in the depths of the you. He is good in just this eminent sense; He does not fill me up with goods, but compels me to goodness, which is better than goods received.¹³³

Nietzsche forgoes the question of value in favour of the question of *valuation*, affirmation, the will that forms value. Levinas asks about the Desire which orients us toward the invisible. We cannot know the invisible, nor what relation the hollowed-out desire bears to its object. This is why Nietzsche ‘knows not’ what value is, and why Levinas recognizes that justice is never done to the Other within a said. One desires the invisible. But this means that the relationship between the will to power beyond being and the will to power encountered within being, as well as the relationship between the responsibility imbued in the self hither from being and that responsibility felt and exercised within being—these relationships always remain enigmatic. It is not inconceivable that Nietzsche and Levinas describe the same phenomenon—the original dimension of value—but co-opt and interpret it to their individual, personal ends. In Levinasian terms, this is to say that both recognize a similar structure of value but give radically different expressions to it in a saying. Both Nietzsche and Levinas imply that value is not a traditional object, and one does not approach value from the *desired* or *willed* alone, but from the *Desiring* or *willing*.

This is decisively not an opportunity to abandon the question of value in philosophy—a proposal which cannot be asserted without begging the question of value itself. Nor can the question be ‘unasked’ and forgotten. One cannot ‘unhear’ the resonance of the beyond; its being heard is already a presupposition of one’s having irrevocably responded and been dominated by the question, by critique. One cannot cease to be a metaphysical self, Levinas would say, by ignoring Desire. One is possessed by Desire beyond the possibility of its being exorcised.

¹³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 84-5. Desire and the ethical origins of the self do indeed have a broader significance in also being the origin of knowledge *qua* critique.

¹³¹ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 163. Emphasis mine.

¹³² Cf. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 159: “Power is enjoyed only as *more* power. One enjoys not its possession but its increase.” Cf. Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 4*, 7: Every power is a power only as long as it is more power; that is to say, an increase in power. Power can maintain itself in itself, that is, in its essence, only if it overtakes and overcomes the power level it has already attained.”

¹³³ Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 165.

Likewise, Nietzsche would say that a plebeian pretension to passiveness is not a real resistance to will to power. A certain will or Desire possesses one and hollows one out for Desire's domination of the self.¹³⁴ Proposed alternative questions to the axiological one are founded on presupposed *answers* to the question of value. What is instead required is a way to properly integrate the invisible, the unfound and unknown, the abyss and null-site, into an account of value. Cliché answers present themselves: attainment is the cessation of desire; it is the journey not the destination that has significance. But in themselves these are not answers to what values should be upheld, what goals pursued, nor what the significance is of value as an affirmation of an invisible—perhaps arbitrary—goal. Given what differently-minded philosophers have been able to retrieve from this abyss—will to power and ethical responsibility—with roughly equal plausibility, we ought to be vigilant and mindful regarding the problem. On the face of it it appears as though a variety of—potentially monstrous—values can be salvaged from this abyss; and as such an understanding of value in this form is imperative. The conclusion that the question of value can have no answer and therefore requires none is an unsatisfactory attempt to shy away from the difficulty and avoid the pain of confrontation. The willingness and *ability* to do so rather indicates that one's will or Desire has not been elicited whatsoever—the question of value is not even applicable to one able to ignore the question. Furthermore one cannot be wholly satisfied having posited one's arbitrary goal into this formal, indefinite solicitation of will and Desire—as Nietzsche sometimes prescribes.¹³⁵ That is, given a certain ambiguous will to power or Desire, positing an arbitrary goal or value toward which to exercise this power, is unsatisfactory for value. Value is not *simply* the product of valuation—this leads to a relativism and nihilism, and is actually an ill-founded assertion. If value persists, the world is always already found with one's values projected into it; hence one can equally say that the world of value *elicits* Desire or affirmation—which implies some standard of validity beyond arbitrary valuation. It is an ambiguity.

The question with which this inquiry began—namely, how does the question of value arise for human beings?—has been developed but not fully answered. The analysis through Nietzsche and Levinas reveals an account of value, the principle of which lies beyond being and the object of which is invisible. My hypothesis is that a conception of value must have this ambiguity at its heart, that it will have to find a viable way to incorporate this enigmatic nature of value as that which is posited yet elicited, steadfastly directed yet toward an object that remains invisible. When an inquiry into the origin of human value necessarily directs one to its origin prior to origins, we cease to be able to speak of the simple 'origin' of value. The structure of value seems to preclude its being formulated in a regular question. Value is the question 'what ought the first question to be?' It is the inverse of a self-refuting assertion: it is a question that precludes the possibility of answer and yet always presupposes an answer. 'What is value?' is akin to 'what is inquiry?' In some sense it has always already been answered when the question is asked; and in an equally valid—or equally invalid—sense it can never be answered because every answer presupposes unfounded presuppositions in the inquiry. The question itself is vaguely absurd yet necessarily presupposed. Analogously, the question 'what is value?'

¹³⁴ Cf. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 191. The soul is the Other in me—Desire is one's being *possessed*. Likewise Nietzsche often regards the subject as the epiphenomenon of the active (metaphysical) will to power.

¹³⁵ This is suggested quite explicitly in the 1886 preface to the second edition of *Human, all too Human*. Cf. especially §6-8.

presupposes some value which directs the inquiry; but the answer is not thereby had—hence the persistence of the question. The dialectic is familiar to the search for epistemological foundations. The constant resurgence of skepticism in the history of philosophy—despite its dependence on truth for its own assertion—Levinas supposes, is a product of the originally diachronic nature of truth. “Skepticism, which traverses the rationality or logic of knowledge, is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said.”¹³⁶

Again, justice is never done to the object of Desire in a said, Desire is never adequately defined and the will to power can never be wholly determined in factual human will. What Levinas suggests in terms of knowledge we might rephrase in terms of value. We are unable to identify the object which elicits value with the human valuation that affirms it. Levinas believes this is a problem with ontology and epistemology; and he believes that the validity of skepticism, or the greater ambiguity which skepticism represents, lies in the diachrony, the ethics prior to ontology. But this paradox has a prior significance in value, where the elicitation of Desire cannot quite explain the conferring of value, nor can the conferring of value do justice to the elicitation of Desire. There is no way to ‘identify’ value which is a willing—which has its origin on the hither side of being—toward an invisible object.

Beyond the question of value generally, what about *values*? The impulsion, a desire or primordial will, invisible in itself, orients one toward a goal or the desirable which is, too, nebulous, invisible. One cannot arbitrarily posit a goal and proclaim a value. It is felt to be a mendacious self-deception. On the other hand, one never simply discovers a ready-made value to devote oneself to. That would imply an objectivity impossible for value. This is the crux of Nietzsche’s triumph over nihilism: even the valuation that nothing is valuable is itself a subjective *valuation*. Having sunk into the despair of nihilism one is turned around by the acknowledgement that value is the default: even when the world is valued negatively, it is still valued. It is not that the world has *no* value (as though the question did not even arise legitimately), but one has merely pronounced a pessimistic judgement of value which is within one’s power to change. But this is only half of the truth. The world and its good and evil are always already there. In the face of nihilism one must also conclude that the world has failed to elicit valuation. Likewise when one finds interminable value—when one finds oneself embracing the prospect of eternal recurrence, perhaps—it is not *simply* that one has courageously, autonomously affirmed existence. What would be the point—that is, how would it be possible—except by some already persistent value? There are always more subterranean drives, deeper goods and deeper evils, at work. When value is affirmed, it is *also* that life has elicited such an exultation. Even will to power cannot arise out of a value that is conditioned on its being posited by the will to power. Whatever value or lack of value one finds, it appears to be contingent on its being *founded*, but also on its already being there in order to be found. One cannot literally withdraw beyond good and evil to make an autonomous choice. One is always already in a world of good and evil—which, Levinas notes, is the fundamental distinction preceding even the ontological difference.

¹³⁶ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 167-8.

It seems, on the face of it, that neither positive value nor nihilism can get a foothold. One continuously gives way to the other. Nihilism is founded on valuation and yet all valuation is rent by nihilistic suspicion—and such critique is founded on the possibility of value in the first place. This twofold nature of value, its duplicitous expression as both value and valuation, the desired and the desiring, appears like a double-helix. Likewise one finds nihilism and interminable value wrapped around one another and extended indefinitely. The two dispositions never quite engage one another such that one alone could triumph, yet one is never present without the other lurking nearby. Nihilism cannot be concluded due to its presupposition of one's power of valuation; and the presence of value cannot be concluded because its object is invisible and its being defined always appears fraudulent, as though arbitrarily posited for the sake of a hitherto non-existent value. Rather than a double-helix, perhaps nihilism and positive value proceed in the shape of a Mobius strip. The juxtaposed faces collapse into one and no end can be found. The suspicious inquiry into value to the point of inquisition has a nihilistic air, and yet the formal structure of value as a 'diachronic' impulsion toward an invisible seems to provoke such endless questioning. It is possible that this points to a new sense of 'value', one for which nihilism is not the antithesis of value; and nor would nihilism be an extreme on the spectrum of this value, at the opposite end of which would lie *absolute* value. Rather, this analysis seems to lead to the conclusion that one term, 'value' or 'nihilism', can scarcely be breathed without invoking the other. That, too, is an ambiguity.

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