Death, community, myth:
Novalis' and Nietzsche's figures of immanent affirmation

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Contents

Abstract

Although their work is separated by three-quarters of a century, Novalis and
Nietzsche both operated within the intellectual context engendered by an
Enlightenment-era discussion of the human vocation. Both respond to the need for
a new human identity that addresses questions about the ability of the human
being to know its nature and the nature of the universe, act freely, know right
from wrong, and find meaning and value in existence. At the two ends of the
nineteenth century, they present different responses to the problem of alienation
within this new context, as Novalis attempts to salvage a broadly Christian
framework for the human vocation, while Nietzsche reacts against Christian
values and ways of providing meaning, as well as those of its secular successors.

Despite this important difference, Novalis and Nietzsche share a goal of
providing an affirming model of life that escapes the conventional dichotomy of
immanent and transcendent. I compare their models of creative affirmation to
highlight their insights and weaknesses and to identify characteristics of their
work useful for a new response to alienation. The first and second parts of the
thesis examine their respective attempts to enable affirmation, analysing their
accounts of death and suffering, community, and myth, and questioning the extent
to which these avoid relying on the transcendent. The third part identifies aspects
of their work that can contribute to a life-affirming response to alienation. I argue
that, while neither provides a fully satisfying response to the modern situation of
alienation that motivated them, both have insights that should be used in attempts
to cope with the disorientation and isolation associated with the loss of an
authoritative statement of the vocation of humankind. Nietzsche's thoroughgoing
rejection of the transcendent and highlighting of tensions characterising human
life must form part of a response to alienation, while Novalis' models of freedom,
communication, and community better promote fulfilling ways of making sense of
life in the face of its darker aspects. My concluding chapter outlines a form of
immanent affirmation based on these strengths, arguing that this can take place in
a dialogical community of creative individuals.

Résumé

Bien que trois quarts de siècle séparent leurs travaux, Novalis et Nietzsche opéraient dans le contexte intellectuel favorisé par la question de la vocation humaine, comme il a été discuté au cours du siècle des lumières. Tous deux répondent au besoin d'une nouvelle identité humaine qui s'interroge sur la capacité de l'être humain de connaître sa nature et la nature de l'univers, de se comporter librement, de différencier le bien du mal et de trouver un sens et une valeur à l'existence.

Les deux écrivains présentent des réponses différents au problème de l'aliénation de soi dans ce nouveau contexte. Novalis tente de garder un cadre chrétien pour la vocation humaine, tandis que Nietzsche s'oppose aux valeurs et références chrétiennes. Bien que leur projet, sous cet angle important, diffère autant, Novalis et Nietzsche ont en commun l'objectif de fournir une explication affirmante de la vie qui échappe à la dichotomie conventionelle de l'immanence et de la transcendance.

Je compare leurs explications de l'affirmation créative pour mettre en lumière leur perspicacité et leurs limites et pour identifier les caractéristiques de leurs travaux qui sont utiles pour une nouvelle réponse à l'aliénation. La première et la deuxième parties de la thèse analysent leurs explications respectives de la mort et de la souffrance, de la communauté et de la mythologie et évaluent dans quelle mesure ces explications évitent de s'en remettre à la transcendance. La troisième partie identifie les aspects de leurs travaux qui peuvent contribuer à un message affirmant de vie contre l'aliénation. Le rejet complet de Nietzsche de la transcendance et son invocation des tensions qui caractérisent la vie humaine doivent constituer une réponse a l'alienation. Cependant les visions de Novalis de la liberté, de la communication et de la communauté favorisent des façons enrichissantes de donner un sens à la vie face à ses aspects sombres. Dans mon dernier chapitre, j'expose les contours d'une affirmation immanente sur la base de ces qualités et je suggère que cette affirmation peut être effectuée dans une communauté dialogique entre individus créatifs.

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Abbreviations of works by Friedrich Nietzsche

KSA   *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*

A   The antichrist

BGE   Beyond good and evil

BT   The birth of tragedy

CW   The case of Wagner

EH   Ecce homo

GM   On the genealogy of morals

GS   The gay science

NCW   Nietzsche contra Wagner

TI   Twilight of the idols

TL   On the truth and lies in a nonmoral sense

Z   Thus spoke Zarathustra

Chapter 1 Introduction: Alienation and immanent affirmation

> *The whole spiritual universe is split and shattered by the hand of Atheism*
> *into countless quicksilver points of individual existences, which twinkle, melt*
> *into one another, and wander about, meet and part, without unity and*
> *consistency. No one is so much alone in the universe as a denier of God.*
> *With an orphaned heart, which has lost the greatest of fathers, he stands*
> *mourning by the immeasurable corpse of nature, no longer moved or*
> *sustained by the immeasurable Spirit of the universe, but growing in its*
> *grave; and he mourns, until he himself crumbles away from the dead body.*[1]

The above quote by Jean Paul expresses a feeling of terror, misery, and abandonment at the loss of faith in God. Without the divine to unify and make sense of the universe, he believes human beings would be fragmented, alone, and isolated from others, situated in a hopeless, dead world full of pain, which is meaningless and transient. In short, he maintains that without a transcendent ground to give life meaning, human beings are alienated from their existence.

This thesis accepts that atheism has the potential to plunge human beings into a frighteningly alienated existence, and asks if we have the tools to redeem this situation, to affirm ourselves and life in general without reference to the transcendent. I base my investigation on the work of Nietzsche and the early German romantic Novalis, who both describe kinds of interpretive activity or myth-creation as potentially accomplishing this affirmation. The thesis has two goals: to compare the models of creative affirmation provided by Novalis and Nietzsche in order to locate the insights, as well as weaknesses, of their attempts to provide new grounds for loving life; and to identify characteristics of their respective work that could be adopted by a new attempt to respond to alienation.

1.1 Alienation

1.1.1 The vocation of humankind

This thesis compares the responses of Novalis and Nietzsche to the problem of alienation in the form in which it emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century

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[1] Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, "First flower piece," in *Flower, fruit and thorn pieces: Or the married life, death, and wedding of the advocate of the poor, Firmian Stanislaus Siebenkäs*, trans. Edward Henry Noel (Boston: James Monroe, 1865), p.333.

and preoccupied thinkers in the nineteenth century. In western Europe, the development of structures for interpreting life, including one's self, had been influenced by a Christian heritage. In particular, the human being had long been understood on the basis of a relation to God, and the social structures and practices in which European ways of life are embedded emerged partly in response to this understanding. This tradition presented the world and the human being as God's creations, who have fallen away from him and are less than him – finite, flawed, on some accounts even wicked. Individuals inhabiting this paradigm can in one sense be understood as alienated beings in an alienated universe; but on the other hand, they have a clear picture of their nature and vocation, their means of escaping their alienated situation, and the fate that awaits them after death. The system thus allows people to make sense of experience, including, importantly, distressing experiences of pain, unhappiness, and death, and to know how they should act.

Whatever the reasons why the comforting narrative provided by this kind of model began to be less compelling,[2] the eighteenth century saw a proliferation of attempts at new models for making sense of human experience in response to the threat of atheism and the sense of alienation that this dissolution seemed to engender. These efforts sought to justify life, account for human agency, provide a foundation for morality, and give hope for the future, and included works by prominent authors such as Spalding, Jacobi, Mendelssohn, Rehberg, Abbt, and Kant.[3] The same questions occupied thinkers throughout the nineteenth century, which included some of the best-known accounts of alienation by Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche, and continued to do so into the twentieth century, for example in the work of Sartre, Beauvoir, Fanon, and Heidegger.

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[2] For some differing accounts of how this might have happened, see Frederick Depoortere, *The death of God: An investigation into the history of the western concept of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); Karl Barth, *Protestant theology in the nineteenth century: Its background and history* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002); Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[3] For a survey of works on the vocation of humankind in the 18th and 19th centuries see Fotis Jannidis, „Die ‚Bestimmung des Menschen'. Kultursemiotische Beschreibung einer sprachlichen Formel," *Aufklärung* 14 (2002): 75–95.

1.1.2 Novalis, Nietzsche, and the vocation of humankind

Although their work is separated by three-quarters of a century, both Novalis and Nietzsche operated within the intellectual context engendered by this discussion of the human vocation. Both respond to the need for a new human identity that addresses questions about the ability of the human being to know its nature and the nature of the universe, act freely, know right from wrong, and find meaning and value in existence. They address problems of alienation and self-alienation brought to light by new attempts to grasp these issues.[4] At the two ends of the nineteenth century, Novalis and Nietzsche present different responses to the problem of self-alienation within this new context, insofar as Novalis attempts to salvage a broadly Christian framework for a conception of the human vocation, while Nietzsche provides a radical means of coping with alienation that reacts against values and ways of providing meaning that he views as Christian, as well as those of Christianity's secular successors.

Despite the radical nature of this difference – Novalis orienting his ideas of the self and its world towards the divine, while Nietzsche rejects such a basis[5] – this thesis contends that they share a goal of creating an affirming model of existence that overcomes the conventional dichotomy between immanent and transcendent. Studying them together shows a transition from valuing existence by retrieving and integrating into the world we experience values often attributed

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[4] As will emerge in more detail later, for both Novalis and Nietzsche the problem is in fact a constellation of several connected forms of alienation, including: alienation resulting from individuation, that is, our experience of separation from others; alienation resulting from an overemphasis on consciousness or rationality, which exaggerates individuation while concealing and displacing other aspects of experience and other means of engaging with experience; alienation due to moral and epistemological interpretations of life that deny or denigrate aspects of experience and so make it difficult to appropriate or endorse these aspects; an increasing alienation from, or difficulty accepting, these interpretations themselves; and most importantly, the affects of horror, confusion, and futility – the sense of alienation itself – that result from the combination of these forms of alienation. This last, I argue, is the immediate problem that Novalis and Nietzsche believe needs an urgent response: the difficulty of meeting the human need to make sense of and take joy in who we are and the things we experience in light of the forms of alienation just mentioned and the collapse of previous structures for doing so.

[5] Some see this divergence as so radical that any comparison is superficial: e.g., Walter Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to existentialism: Studies in poetry, religion and philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959); Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, psychologist, antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Judith Norman, "Nietzsche and German romanticism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63:3 (2002). I suggest this radical difference makes the comparison interesting, framing the question of the extent to which the transcendent is necessary for affirming life.

to a divine, spiritual realm, to rejecting this realm and trying to endorse existence without reference to it. Although, of course, religious and spiritual responses to the human situation are still widespread, Novalis and Nietzsche, situated at the beginning and end of the nineteenth century, can be seen as representatives of a trend towards atheistic attempts to understand existence and give it meaning. An investigation of the differences between their work is therefore not just relevant to those interested in these particular writers, but is of broader import.

1.2 Immanent affirmation

1.2.1 Immanence

I describe Novalis and Nietzsche as demanding a response to alienation that is "immanent", contrasting it with an attempt to affirm life based on reference to the "transcendent". In this section, I briefly clarify what I mean by this distinction, suggesting what would characterise an immanent affirmation of the self and its world, and why it might be beneficial for an account to have these characteristics.

The term "immanent" usually refers to physical, material things, including the human body and its desires and affects, and "transcendent" to things thought to be outside this realm, such as consciousness, the soul, or God.[6] As such, the dichotomy is part of a series of dualisms that have long characterised the western European worldview, including subject-object, mind-body, rational-physical, conscious-unconscious, and divine-mundane. In each of these dichotomies, the former pole is generally associated with the transcendent, and the latter with the immanent. Since "immanent" is associated with presence, indwelling, or being

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[6] The theological meaning of "transcendent" is things of God as opposed to things of the world. The literal meaning is "beyond" or "going beyond", from the Latin *trans* (beyond) and *scandere* (to climb) (Douglas Harper, *Online etymology dictionary*, www.etmonline.com). The term has stayed close to this sense in Western philosophy. For Kant the transcendent is what is beyond our knowledge, because not appearing in space and time; for Sartre the self is transcendent insofar as it takes a position on itself and its world, rather than being merely immersed in it; Beauvoir stresses the need to transcend one's given life conditions by setting projects for oneself. "Immanent" is derived from the Latin *in* (in/into/on) and *manere* (to dwell) (Harper, *Online etymology dictionary*). In theological usage the term refers to the presence of God in the world. It can also describe empirical, material things as opposed to spiritual, supposedly non-empirical things, or to deny the existence of the latter, and as such to reflect a denial of transcendent-immanent duality.

within, and "transcendent" with the outside, or beyond, a boundary or barrier is set up between the two aspects, which are seen as excluded from each other.

One problem with this dualistic picture is the question of how the two poles interact, since they seem to have radically different natures and to belong to incommensurable realms.[7] Another problem is that, traditionally, the transcendent side of the dichotomy has been valued more highly than the immanent. For example, transcendent aspects are often associated with freedom and divinity. As a result, immanent things are often devalued, either receiving only instrumental value (for example when earthly life is seen as important, not in itself, but as a means to gaining entrance to eternal life in heaven, or for enabling the realisation of our freedom) or losing value altogether (for example when sensuous desires are seen as leading astray from the moral volitions of the mind).

I describe a model as immanent if it explains, and suggests how to value, existence without positing something beyond things we can experience, and if it assumes continuity rather than disjunction between mental and physical events.[8] Such an account denies that the abovementioned poles are fundamentally separate and belong to mutually exclusive levels of existence. It should thereby dispose of the problems of how the various aspects of existence relate and the devaluation of one set of terms in relation to the other. On an immanent model, there is only one world and so, if it has value, it has value on its own account, not by reference to anything beyond it. This entails that there is no God or heaven beyond the world,

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[7] This was at issue when Novalis and Nietzsche were writing (as well as today): J. G. Fichte, "[First] introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*," in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and other writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994); *The System of ethics: According to the principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale and Günther Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); F. W. J. Schelling, *System of transcendental idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978); Emil Fackenheim, *The God within: Kant, Schelling, and historicity*, ed. John Burbidge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp.62–63; George di Giovanni, "From Jacobi's philosophical novel to Fichte's idealism: Some comments on the 1798–99 'Atheism dispute,'" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27:1 (1989); George Seidel, *Activity and Ground: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (New York: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1976); David E. Klemm and Günther Zöller, *Figuring the self: Subject, absolute, and others in classical German philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); Günther Zöller, *Fichte's transcendental philosophy: The original duplicity of intelligence and will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[8] For a similar definition of immanent affirmation (or in this case "immanent reorientation") in regard to Nietzsche, see Adrian del Caro, *Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric of earth* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp.63, 81.

although an immanent conception of deity is possible. Similarly, there is no human soul beyond its presence in the world, and no mind observing the world from outside it; the human being, including its conscious aspects, is completely continuous with its physical environment. On an immanent account, an explanation of how the human being comes to know and act in the world, as well as if and how it can love life, must allow that the various characteristics of experience comprise the whole picture: there is no further realm behind them that can underpin them, give them meaning, or justify them. In practice, as we shall see, it is not easy to build a coherent picture of the world on these lines. Dualistic and transcendent ways of thinking are entrenched in language, habits of thought, and ways of life, and a critique of existing structures for thought and ways of being can alienate from these without embedding one in a satisfying alternative.

1.2.2 Novalis, Nietzsche, and immanence

Both Nietzsche and Novalis view dualistic thinking and an emphasis on the transcendent as underlying the modern sense of alienation, including its disillusionment with prevailing means of valuing life. They attempt to provide conceptions of human existence that take account of the modern experience, in which the meaning of life and the nature of the self are no longer given in an obvious way, by shifting the basis for affirmation from discovering an objective cosmodicy to creating a joyful worldview, on the basis of a project of integrating the various elements of experience into a desirable whole. As part of this undertaking, both identify dangers in a one-sidedly discursive or intellectual interpretation of this experience, and attempt to redress this by recognising the centrality to human experience of its affective and physical aspects. They demand the integration of non-rational and non-conscious elements in an affirmative vision of the self, giving a central role to creativity. Both stress the fluid, changing nature of the self and its opacity, in contrast to atomistic accounts or any accounts of the self as having a fixed nature to which it has conscious, accurate, or comprehensive access. Their means of coping with alienation centre on repeated self-overcoming, presenting this as part of a free, aesthetically motivated creation

of meaning that grants value to existence. They maintain that this self-constructing activity is an essential characteristic of human existence, as well as necessary for coping with the modern situation of alienation.

While both Novalis and Nietzsche claim that a satisfying model of human identity must avoid overemphasising the role of discursive rationality or consciousness in either constituting or understanding the self and its world, as well as avoid requiring a given or objective meaning for existence in general in order to embrace that existence, they differ in how they think this freedom and creativity should be realised. On Novalis' account, we overcome the alienation that emerges from an overly rational worldview by constructing new, authentic representations of our selves in a free, open, and creative community, as part of a project of realising our divine nature. Nietzsche, however, rejects the goal of self-revelation to and with others, as well as the idea of God, in favour of individual self-creation. He claims that society makes us less, not more, free and fulfilled, and that self-affirmation demands tearing ourselves away from social constraints. This difference in attitude towards the social existence of the individual is a central theme of this thesis. I argue that studying the differences between Novalis' and Nietzsche's accounts in this regard has two useful outcomes: first, it illuminates weaknesses in their respective models and some of the motivations behind these weaknesses; and second, it shows important characteristics that any successful attempt at an immanent affirmation must have. I conclude that Nietzsche's identification of the darkness and dangers in social interaction should be addressed in such an attempt, but as part of a model of dialogical meaning-creation that views alienation positively as the condition of possibility for freedom and creativity as well as for genuine encounters with otherness.

1.3 Structure of the thesis
Following this introduction, this thesis is divided into three parts. The first and second examine the attempts at affirmation provided, respectively, by Novalis and Nietzsche, while the third identifies components of their accounts that, I argue, can contribute to a life-affirming response to alienation. Parts 1 and 2 are each

divided into four chapters, investigating the approaches of each thinker to death and suffering, the individual and community, and the need for and nature of new myths, before analysing the extent to which their responses to alienation successfully affirm existence and do so on an immanent basis. Part 3 comprises two chapters, respectively comparing the philosophies of affirmation of the two thinkers and suggesting in outline form the characteristics that a new attempt to affirm existence should take from their accounts.

In chapter 2 I show that Novalis aims to retrieve value for both death and life, presenting both as part of a developing self-awareness of the divine, viewed as an absolute self. I argue that Novalis' project critiques prevailing dualistic and overly discursive models and demands the reintegration of apparently separate elements of existence such as the mind and the body and the self and the rest of the world. Chapter 3 argues that Novalis sees participation in a creative community as necessary to this undermining of divisions and re-imagining of the universe and the place of human beings within it. In chapter 4, I show how his account modifies concepts from Christian traditions to stress the inherently physical and universal nature of spirit, infinity, goodness, and other attributes of the divine, or emphasises trends within Christianity that already do this. In chapter 5, I indicate the ways in which Novalis' work moves towards an immanent account of existence, and some ways in which it falls short of such an account.

Chapter 6 begins my investigation of Nietzsche's response to alienation by describing his move from an earlier account, in which death and suffering are redeemed on the basis of an appearance-reality distinction, to his later attempt to promote delight in tragic, painful existence without recourse to a world beyond experience. In chapter 7, I show how a shift from his earlier, communal model for affirming life to a later, individual model leads Nietzsche to respond to alienation in a way that, rather than undermining or reducing this alienation, demands that we exaggerate our isolation and become strong enough to delight in it. Chapter 8 argues that the ironic, self-critical stance that Nietzsche advocates towards the new myths through which an individual affirms existence underscores this need for hardened individuals who can enjoy their alienated existence. In chapter 9, I

summarise some criticisms and defences that have been made of Nietzsche's account, highlighting his insights and contributions to the project of making sense of and endorsing existence in light of the loss of religious foundations, as well as what I conclude is his biggest failing: his neglect of the importance to self-affirmation of engagement in an authentic community.

Chapter 10 forms the bulk of part 3, and in this chapter I juxtapose Novalis' and Nietzsche's accounts in order to analyse their comparative strengths and weaknesses. I argue that Nietzsche's thorough rejection of the transcendent and highlighting of tensions characterising human life – particularly social life – must be incorporated by a response to alienation, and that Novalis' account does not do this. However, Novalis' models of freedom, communication, and community better promote a fulfilling construction of new ways of making sense of life in the face of its darker aspects. My concluding chapter suggests the outlines for a new form of immanent affirmation on the basis of these strengths, arguing that this can take place in a dialogical community of creative individuals.

This thesis establishes that, while neither Novalis nor Nietzsche provides a fully satisfying response to the modern situation of self-alienation that motivated their work, both have important insights that should be taken up in the attempt to cope with the experience of disorientation and isolation associated with the loss of an authoritative statement of the vocation of humankind.

<u>Part 1 Novalis' philosophy of affirmation: Faith and community</u>

In this first part of this thesis, I argue that, despite operating largely within a broadly Christian paradigm, and despite his overt celebration of death, the early German romantic poet Novalis is engaged in an attempt to affirm life, and that he takes steps towards doing so on an immanent basis. The response to alienation that Novalis provides contains elements for an affirmation of existence that is independent of God and indeed from the ascription of value to the human being and its world on the basis of anything thought to transcend them. As such, his work suggests the possibility of finding ways to feel at home in the world as we encounter it without denying or explaining away the ways that it resists us, causes us pain, and ultimately annihilates us.

In the first chapter I argue that Novalis' work, while fascinated with death, nevertheless provides an optimistic, life-affirming vision of existence. The second chapter emphasises the importance for Novalis' view of human identity and the human vocation of community with other human beings and the natural world. The third chapter shows how Novalis' positive vision of life, including its suffering and tragedy, modifies and reworks Christian themes, pushing these towards an immanent interpretation. I end this part of the thesis by arguing that Novalis' work does not provide, but suggests the possibility of, a solution to alienation that does not have recourse to otherworldly foundations, such as a transcendent God, a thing in itself, or the eternal life of the individual.

Chapter 2 Death I: Self-consciousness, love, and death

2.1 Introduction

It might seem strange to cast Novalis as a philosopher of affirmation, given his reputation as life-denying, escapist, and morbid. This reputation is based not only on the sad circumstances of Novalis' life, which included the early death of several family members and friends, including his fiancée, Sophie, and his own death from tuberculosis at the age of 28, nor because his most famous work, the *Hymns to the Night,* describes death in adoring terms, even including a passage titled "Longing for death". These factors are not simply extrinsically connected to Novalis' thought; rather, the philosophical position that he took towards the death of his loved ones and his own death, and that underlay his poetic works, gives death an important place as the consummation of the task of life. A passage in the *Hymns*, based on a diary entry following an experience at Sophie's grave, reveals the importance for him of death as the place of final reconciliation, through love, with the eternal:

> Once when I shed bitter tears, when, disintegrated in pain, my hope melted away, and I stood desolate on the arid mound, which in narrow, dark space held the figure of my life [.…] when came from blue distances – from the heights of my old bliss a twilight shiver – and suddenly ripped the bond of birth – the chain of light. Away flew the earthly glory and my sorrow with it […]. The mound became a dust cloud – through the cloud I saw the transfigured features of the beloved. In Her eyes rested eternity – I grasped Her hands, and the tears became a sparkling, unbreakable bond. [.…] I cried lovely tears on Her neck at the new life. – It was the first, the only dream – and since then I have felt eternal, unshakeable faith in the heaven of night and its light, the beloved.[9]

It is fair to say that Novalis celebrates death. However, it is not true that this entails rejecting or denigrating life. Novalis attempts to reclaim death for his account of what life is and why it is valuable, and views this attempt as important for overcoming the negative consequences of regarding death as an end to life and

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[9] Novalis, „Hymnen an die Nacht," in *Schriften. Zweite, nach den Handschriften ergänzte, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage in vier Bänden*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn und Richard Samuel, bd I (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960–), p.135 s.3. Translations of Novalis' writings and all other German texts except Nietzsche's are my own.

something to be feared and avoided. For Novalis, death is not opposed to life, but part of it; and not the ending of the self, but an essential part of ourselves. Death, he claims, is when we finally come into our own as our true selves: "Life is the beginning of death. Life is for the sake of death. Death is beginning and ending at the same time, separation and closer self-bonding at the same time."[10] In this chapter I show why, for Novalis, this is the case, how he thinks we can realise this fact, and what he believes the benefits will be of adopting such a view.

2.2 The world as divine, or the absolute self

Novalis does not merely attempt to return value to death at the expense of life; he tries to overcome a worldview that sees these as opposed and presents one term as precious and the remaining term as deficient by comparison. His work attempts to supersede several dichotomies that he sees as characterising the prevailing understanding of the self and its universe, including dichotomies between life and death, subject and object, the rational and emotional or sensuous, conscious and unconscious, activity and passivity, and divine and mundane. Novalis believes that the segregation of existence into these dualities is a source of unhappiness, particularly forms of unhappiness associated with alienation. The mutually exclusive relationship between the terms means that human identity is constructed as essentially centred on one or other pole of each dichotomy, while the other is rejected from one's sense of self and/or devalued. This alienating tendency also divides individuals from important parts of experience which this dualistic account construes as external to them, such as the natural world, other human beings, and God.

For Novalis, these supposedly extra-individual parts of experience are in fact essential parts of the self. Underneath the apparent dichotomies currently structuring the universe, the world is a unity. Novalis is a pantheist,[11] viewing all

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[10] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," in *Schriften*, bd II, p.416 #15/p.417 #14. Novalis' notes "Miscellaneous Observations" and the published text "Pollen" are very similar. I give references to both where possible; where they differ I cite "Pollen" unless stated otherwise.

[11] In 4.3.1 I provide an argument for why we should describe Novalis' thought as pantheistic rather than panentheistic.

existence as part of the same absolute, divine essence, the same greater self. In other words, the world is God, and underneath its superficial divisions into finite entities, everything is both one and the same and divine: "We stand in relation to all parts of the universe, as well as with the future and past."[12] What we perceive as objects or individual human beings are not primarily distinct substances related externally and physically to one another; rather, they are connected internally by a shared spiritual nature. This whole develops, differentiates itself, and forms relationships between the differentiated elements, but the division into distinct entities occurs at a relatively superficial level, and they retain their inner connections. It is the task of human beings to make these visible.

Taking up this task facilitates the original purpose of the world as the gradual development of God from an absolute, undifferentiated, blind unity, to a community of individuated entities in relationship to each other: "Before abstraction everything is one, but one like chaos; after abstraction everything is unified again, but this unification is a free interconnection of independent, self-determined beings. From a heap, a community has emerged, chaos is transformed into a manifold world."[13] Through these relationships, particularly those involving human beings, the divine becomes conscious and first comes to know itself.

2.3 Discursive reason and the scientific outlook

The process of differentiation is based on increasing individuation and intellectualisation in the development of particular entities and, at its most pronounced, advanced forms of consciousness. However, on Novalis' account overemphasis on this tendency, especially on consciousness, discursive reason, and autonomy, underlies a divided and alienated existence. For Novalis, not just scientific reason, but consciousness in general, works by creating representations. These enable thought and action, but also divide the individual from phenomena and phenomena from each other, and all these from their essence as embodiments of the divine. Scientific reason exacerbates this divisive effect. Although Novalis

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[12] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.454 #91/p.455 # 92.
[13] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.454–56 #94/pp.455 #95.

in fact places a high value on science and discursive knowledge,[14] he maintains that their one-sided application and claims to objectivity are misleading and damaging. His critique of reason suggests that privileging the rational (narrowly construed as conscious, discursive thought) is responsible for perpetuating and intensifying alienation in several ways, which I outline in the following sections. The outcome of these tendencies is, according to Novalis' account, to exacerbate separations between parts of existence, obscure their potential for less divided ways of being, and foster the affect of horror and meaninglessness that I described in the introduction as associated with modern alienation.

2.3.1 The subject

In the first place, this overemphasis separates the human being from the rest of the universe. Discursive reason sees human beings as knowing and acting subjects, and the physical world (and some mental events) as object of this knowledge and action. For modern thought, the individual seems to be essentially separate from the rest of the world. It understands and acts on the world at a remove, through sensorial, linguistic, and logical pictures, and believes its identity to be separate from the world represented in these pictures. According to Novalis, this is a historical development, rather than a necessary way of viewing things – part of the emergence of a way of understanding that in general divides and segregates:

> It must have been a long time before human beings thought to designate the manifold objects of their senses with a common name and to set them over against themselves. Through practice developments were promoted, and in all developments separations, dissections are promoted, so that one can easily compare them with the refractions of rays of light. So also did our interiority only gradually split into such manifold powers, and with continuous effort these fissures will also grow.[15]

For discursive reason, the human being is therefore always alienated from its environment, as well as from the divine, which also appears as a separate entity set over and against the individual.

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[14] See, e.g., „Christenheit oder Europa," in *Schriften*, bd III, p.520.
[15] Novalis, „Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs," in *Schriften*, bd I, p.82.

Novalis acknowledges a necessary connection between individual existence and separation (see 2.6). The differentiation of the individual out of the unified cosmos necessarily involves separation, and consciousness further requires the subject-object division.[16] But the original unity of subject and object, which, while disrupted in any form of conscious or individual existence, nonetheless underlies this existence, is denied by a model in which the rest of the world relates to the human being only as the object of its thought and action. The human being in this situation lives as if its identity is constituted by its narrow existence as an individual, fundamentally separate from its environment.

2.3.2 The object

The second source of alienation within the worldview of one-sidedly conscious, rational experience is that the world seems divisible into individual entities. This, Novalis believes, is an artificial dismemberment of the universe that denies its real value and vital spirit: scientists "sought to fathom the inner structure and relations of the limbs with sharp knife wounds. Under their hands friendly nature died, and left behind only dead, twitching remains".[17] This division and categorisation obscures the unity of the cosmos by construing it as aggregate, and conceals its divine nature by presenting it as physical, rather than as manifesting spirit. In addition, the division underscores the separateness of the subject from the objects of its experience by presenting the human being as one entity among others. The world seems to consist of separate, isolated, physical entities, comprehensible without reference to their deeper nature as parts of a whole, let alone a spiritual

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[16] Much has been written on the relation of this notion to Fichte's work: see, e.g., Manfred Frank, "Philosophical foundations of early romanticism," in Klemm and Zöller, *Figuring the self*; Martin Götze, „Das praktische Ich in der Wissenschaftslehre und in der frühromantischen Philosophie des Lebens," *Fichte-Studien* 19 (2002): 137–47; Christian Iber, „Frühromantische Subjektkritik," *Fichte-Studien* 12 (1997): 111–26; Bernward Loheide, *Fichte und Novalis. Transzendental-philosophisches Denken im romantisierenden Diskurs* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "Borderline philosophy? Incompleteness, incomprehension, and the romantic transformation of philosophy," *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 6 (2008): 123–44; Géza von Molnár, *Novalis' Fichte studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970); Helmut Schanze, „Das kleine Buch und das laute Weltereignis. Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre als Paradigma und Problem der Romantik," *Fichte-Studien* 12 (1997): 169–79; Berbeli Wanning, „Statt Nicht-Ich – Du! Die Umwendung der Fichteschen Wissenschaftslehre ins Dialogische durch Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg)," *Fichte-Studien* 12 (1997): 153–68.
[17] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.84.

whole. Their internal connections are neglected, making it seem that their superficial status as divided from each other constitutes their true and only nature.

2.3.3 Relations of causality and analogy

Furthermore, the causal model of relations between the entities identified through the dismembering process of individuation obscures what Novalis views as their real nature as emanations of spirit that are internally interconnected. Interpreting the world on a model of efficient causality is not compatible with interpretation in terms of divine purposes, meanings, hierarchies, and relations of correspondence, which Novalis thinks reflects the real unified and divine nature of all things: "What is nature? – an encyclopaedic systematic index or plan of our spirit";[18] "Everything that we experience is a *communication*. Thus the world is in fact a *communication* – revelation of spirit. The time is no more when the spirit of God was understandable. The sense of the world is lost. We have stopped at the letter. We have lost that which is appearing in favour of the appearance."[19] In other words, despite its usefulness and its ability to describe a certain picture of the world, the Enlightenment worldview misses something important about the nature of the universe. For Novalis, rather than a free unfolding of spirit in a physical medium, the world is seen by an overly rational view as a dead realm of isolated objects, moved mechanically, and incapable of realising the divine: "The deep meaning of mechanics lay heavily on these anchorites [scientists] in the desert of reason; [....] with wonderful self-denial they sacrificed the holiest and most beautiful things of the world to first self-consciousness".[20]

If this rational worldview does admit a spiritual realm, it is problematic. The spiritual is presented as separate from the physical and their relation mysterious:

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[18] Novalis, „Anekdoten," in *Schriften*, bd II, p.583 #248. Novalis' view of the analogical relations of levels of existence (e.g., science, poetry, physical objects) is informed by medieval biblical exegesis. The latter is described in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval exegesis*, vol. 1, *The four senses of scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, and Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). On Novalis' version of this idea see Alison Stone, "German romantic and idealist conceptions of nature," *Internationales Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus* 6 (2008): 86; Mary Strand, *I/You: Paradoxical constructions of self and other in early German romanticism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p.27.
[19] Novalis, „Anekdoten," II p.594 #316; see also „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II 460/461 #102/112.
[20] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III p.520.

"God was made into the idle spectator of the great, stirring spectacle that the scholars performed".[21] This applies not only to God, but also to aspects of human existence thought to transcend physical processes, such as freedom, effective action, and thought. The primacy of causal explanation contributes to a worldview that effectively banishes the spiritual from the world. As a result, mundane things lose their worth in relation to the more highly-valued spiritual realm.[22]

2.3.4 Alienating epistemology

The above account of the universe also, according to Novalis, includes an alienating ideal for knowledge. Truth seems a matter of attaining representations that are adequate to an external object, supporting the idea that thoughts are of a separately existing, given objective world, rather than a world co-constituted by the human mind. The goal of epistemological approximation to an objective order assumes that the world is a relatively stable realm constituted separately from human thought, which knowledge can more or less accurately reflect.

To begin with, this reinforces reason's tendency to present objects of knowledge as separate from and set over against the subject. The connections between the individual and its environment seem to be external, rather than between parts of a whole, and to occur after both have come into existence, rather than to be an interaction that shapes the forms in which they exist. The world is seen as independent of the human being, and something that the mind's representations can mimic, rather than, as Novalis understands it, as something that at a deeper level shares the mind's nature, that the mind participates in constructing, and that therefore reflects the mind and is reflected by it.

According to Novalis, the world – and, indeed, the human being, as part of the world – is formed through interpretation, rather than existing ready-made prior to interpretation.[23] There is no single, given world existing independently of interaction, of which objective knowledge is possible: "One stands in just as many ungraspably various relations to nature as to human beings, and as she shows

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[21] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III p.516.
[22] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.88.
[23] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen," II p.462 #109.

herself as childish to the child, and obligingly adapts herself to his childish heart, so she shows herself to the gods as divine, and agrees with this high spirit. One cannot say that there is one nature without saying something over the top, and all efforts at truth in speech and language about nature only alienates ever more from naturalness."[24] The belief that the relationship between the human being and its world is an extrinsic one prevents the human being from realising her nature as part of a larger whole that embodies the divine, and as creative, with a vocation to use this creativity to draw out the divine nature of existence.[25]

The ideal of objective knowledge denies the intrinsic, symbolic connections between things based on their status as manifestations of the divine, which on Novalis' account underlies the ability to learn about the world. For Novalis, the human being is not just situated within the world, but relates internally to it through their shared spiritual nature. Knowledge is therefore not acquired by encountering something different from oneself, but by being prompted by encounters with the world to discover something within oneself. Thus he asks "How can a person have a sense for something, if he does not have the seed of it within him?"[26] This process is possible because of the divinity of the self and its world: since these are parts of the same whole, each has its analogue within the other, awareness of which it can awaken through association:

> In our mind everything is associated in the most specific, pleasing and lively way. The strangest things come together through one place, one time, one strange similarity, an error, some kind of accident. Thus emerge wonderful unities and peculiar associations – and one reminds of all – is the sign of many and is itself designated and summoned by many. Understanding and fantasy are unified in the weirdest way through time and place and one can say that each thought, each appearance of our mind is the most individual member of a thoroughly peculiar whole.[27]

By contrast, the conviction that knowledge approximates a pre-existing external reality presents learning as a process of encountering new things or

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[24] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.85.
[25] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.426 #32/p.427 #32.
[26] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.418 #19/p/419 #18.
[27] Novalis, „Fragmente und Studien 1799–1800," in *Schriften*, bd III, p.650 #559; see also „Lehrlinge," I pp.79–80; „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.412 #2/p.413 #2.

having new thoughts about things, rather than of discovering things already held in seed form within the self. The idea that knowledge is of a given, objective realm thereby separates self and world from each other, and even more fundamentally from their real essence as manifestations of the divine.

2.3.5 Dualism

For Novalis, scientific reason exacerbates a long-running tendency to separate the divine and spiritual from the mundane, entailing the fragmentation of the self and often leading to the denigration of worldly things. As I mentioned, the latter emerge as entities or processes either with no connection to the spiritual, or with a connection to the spiritual that seems paradoxical and/or impossible to pinpoint or describe. The spiritual essence of physical phenomena is denied; the spiritual, rational, and conscious are seen as separate from the physical and emotional. This exclusion of rational and conscious characteristics of experience from physical or emotional aspects, and the privileging of the former, means that the latter may be construed as a hindrance to knowledge and right acting, or as only capable of aiding these when subordinated to reason.

    As a result, the human being becomes a fragmented individual, who has trouble identifying with either her rational or sensual capacities. The outcome is usually the construal of not only nature in general, but also the human body and its emotional and sensory affects, as not genuinely part of the human soul, or as subordinate and retrograde elements that should be mastered or overcome by reason. Novalis thinks that the physical realm is often seen as in itself lacking importance, meaning, or justification, while the spiritual, including the rational human mind, is valued as truer, freer, more virtuous, or in other ways better. He describes the prevailing way of thought as maintaining that

> the great moment cannot fail to appear, when all humanity will, through a
> great, common decision, rip themselves from this painful condition, from
> this terrible prison […] and be saved to a happier world, to their ancient
> father. [….] Intercourse with powers of nature, with animals, plants, crags,
> storms and waves must necessarily make human beings similar to these
> objects, and this similarisation, transformation and dissolution of the divine

and human in unbounded powers is the spirit of nature, of this terrible engulfing power[.][28]

When applied to the world in general, the dissociation of the physical and the spiritual-rational strips mundane things of their divine and rational nature, suggesting that they are erratic, meaningless, demeaning and abhorrent, and presenting any relationship to the spiritual aspects of existence as extrinsic. The world loses its ability to signify God or instruct about the nature of the human being; instead, it is a collection of physical events conditioned by natural laws, with no meaning or value. God is outside the world, as are the spiritual or rational elements of the human mind. By comparison to the spiritual, which is perfect, eternal, true, and rational, the mundane appears flawed, transient, false, and nonsensical: "Nature too remained, as far as one went, always a terrible mill of death: everywhere monstrous change, irresolvable swirling chains, a realm of voracity, the most amazing mischief, an immensity pregnant with unhappiness; the few light points illuminate only a thus more horrifying night, and terrors of all kinds must frighten every observer to senselessness."[29] The denial of the divine inner nature of the world results in a world stripped of what to Novalis is its true meaning and value as a manifestation of spirit, leaving it a place of terror.

2.3.6 The fragmented self

Meanwhile, the human being becomes fragmented and alienated from itself. The connections between its rational and sensuous elements seem mysterious, precluding an integrated vision of the self. Furthermore, some aspects thought to be part of one's identity are experienced as external to the self and less valuable – things to be rejected. The rational mind is cast as essential to the self and the source of value, and the sensuous and emotional parts of the self as inessential and deleterious.[30] The self is thereby alienated from the latter characteristics and

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[28] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I pp.88–89.
[29] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.88.
[30] For example, Kant presents only rationally motivated action as autonomous, dividing the person into a rational self that can direct behaviour autonomously and in alignment with the good, and a sensuous self that is part of the physical world and determined by it, and whose inclinations must be overcome. Consciousness and reason provide knowledge not only of facts, but also of right and

actions motivated by them. On the other hand, this model can also have the opposite effect, alienating the individual from reason, which may seem to be an external constraint on an essentially emotional, feeling self. Schiller noted this possibility in relation to Kant's moral theory, arguing that, "If sensuous nature were always the suppressed part and never belonged to the *effective* part of ethics, how could it wholeheartedly impart its fiery emotions to celebrate a triumph over itself?"[31] Either way, the result is an alienated and fragmented self who misunderstands her true nature and is led to disown aspects of her identity.[32]

2.4 Interpretation, intuition

Novalis struggles against the view that the living world of dynamic, vital forces is alien to the essence of humanity and the source of evil. He tries to overcome this mutual exclusivity of dichotomous terms and the alienation that it entails, as well as the terror of death that he believes results from such a picture of existence.[33] He does not deny that this alienation and these terrors characterise existence as we now live it. In the first place, Novalis is acutely aware of the reality of suffering, separation, loss, and death, as a result of both his personal life and his pietistic upbringing, and his philosophical project is largely motivated by the need to find

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wrong. Feelings or sensations do not give access to such knowledge, and actions based on these are construed as subjective or egoistic, evil, or not morally relevant. Reducing the physical world, including the human body, sensations, and emotions, to mere matter moved by impersonal forces denies these a moral meaning. The physical world is clearly necessary to an account of morals – it is, after all, the locus of action. However, after setting up a dichotomy between the spiritual-rational and the physical-emotional, it is difficult to see how the demands of reason can motivate or even relate to the emotional and physical human being. One result is that one is encouraged to deny, reject, or overcome supposedly non-rational elements of oneself so reason can govern one's beliefs and behaviours. Thus one is alienated from one's supposedly non-rational characteristics.

[31] In "On grace and dignity," in *Schiller's 'On grace and dignity' in its cultural context*, ed. and trans. Jane Curran, ed. Christophe Fricker (New York: Camden House, 2005), p.152; see also Henry Allison, *Idealism and freedom: Essays on Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.117–18; Allison, *Kant's theory of freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.181, 238; Anne Baxley, "The beautiful soul and the autocratic agent: Schiller's and Kant's 'children of the house,'" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41:4 (2003): 509; John Zeis, "Virtue and self-alienation," *Lyceum* 3:2 (1991): 45–48.

[32] Of course, Novalis' contemporaries and predecessors did not universally denigrate the senses and the emotions in favour of discursive reason. The above description of the "scientific outlook" is best taken as identifying a tendency that was rarely if ever espoused in a pure form.

[33] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.450 #81/p.451 #82.

a way to affirm life in the face of these realities.[34] Secondly, on Novalis' model the divisions that lie at the root of transience, pain, longing, and death are real, as necessary to experience. For Novalis we live in a world constructed in interpretation,[35] which means that to the extent that the world is seen as atomistic and determined, and the human being as a rational, autonomous subject, the world actually is atomistic and determined, and the human being actually a subject. In other words, interpretation in the terms of scientific reason reveals something true about the world. However, because it misrepresents the relationship of mind and world as between originally separate elements it has the important and damaging consequences that I described above (2.3). The knowledge this interpretation mediates is incomplete and misleading, constructing the world as characterised by dichotomies and divided into individual entities that are alienated from themselves, each other, and God. Despite its current construction as such, Novalis denies that it is essential to the universe to be constituted by separate atoms, or to the human being to be constituted as an individual agent. Underneath these modes of being, the divine runs through all things, uniting them and giving them meaning. As a result, we can have the beginnings of non-discursive, intuitive access to the real nature of the cosmos, despite its current constitution as the

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[34] See Wilhelmine Maria Sepasgorian, *Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip des Lebens. Eine systematische Auseinandersetzung mit der Todesproblematik im Leben und Werk des Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), pp.15, 199, 205; William Arctander O'Brien, *Signs of revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p.257. For an account of Novalis' acknowledgement of suffering and death, see David Farrell Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, disease, and death in German idealism and romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). I disagree with Krell's claim that Novalis views the inescapability of illness and death in terms of pollution and contamination, or at least, I believe one must be careful in applying these terms to Novalis. Novalis aims both to subvert the connotations of pollution and evil ascribed to physical, finite existence, including its sensual aspects and its manifestation as disease, and to overcome boundaries. Krell ascribes to Novalis an almost phobic horror of the dissolution of boundaries, and a fear of fluidity and contamination by the other. Krell occasionally suggests (e.g., pp.1, 50) that Novalis aims to retrieve pain and death for a positive, fruitful account of life, but overall he presents Novalis' response to the painful physicality of existence as dark, troubled, and psychologically unhealthy rather than as optimistic. This is not to underestimate the difficulties of a project of affirmation or the importance of remaining aware of the reality of misery, or to deny Novalis' personal struggles with depression following the deaths of his fiancée and brother Erasmus, or even his apparent unwillingness to endure being with the dying (he fled the deathbeds of both Sophie and Erasmus). Rather, it is to insist that, far from than wallowing in aspects of existence that he found disgusting, Novalis sought a way to transfigure them.
[35] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.420 #22/p.421 #21.

universe of scientific reason, and these intimations tell us that we could engage differently with the universe, and indeed inhabit a different universe.[36]

Novalis presents the emotions and senses as necessary to see through the one-sidedly rational view and apprehend the spiritual essence underlying phenomena. It is only when our unconscious physical and affective nature participates in constructing interpretations of our environment that we can really understand that environment: "No one will grasp nature who has no organ of nature, no inner tool for creating and dividing nature, who does not, as though spontaneously, everywhere recognise and distinguish nature, and with an inborn joy in creating, in deep manifold relationship with all bodies, mix with all natural beings, almost feeling himself into them, through the medium of feeling."[37] Thought alone cannot capture the vibrancy, spirituality, or real depths of nature:

> Will [man] ever learn to feel? Now he knows this heavenly, most natural of all senses only a little: through feeling the old, longed-for time would return; the element of feeling is an inner light which breaks itself into beautiful, powerful colours. Then the stars would arise in him, he would learn to feel the whole world more clearly and variously where his eyes now show edges and surfaces. He would be master of an infinite game and forget all foolish endeavours in an eternal, self-feeding and always growing enjoyment. Thought is only a dream of feeling, a dead feeling, a pale-grey, weak life.[38]

According to Novalis, an interpretation of the world that raises it towards the divine begins by circumventing narrowly rational categories for acquiring knowledge and allowing one's intuitions to reveal the way things are.

It is not enough, however, merely to have these intuitions; they must be articulated and, as I argue below, communicated to others, in order to bring the absolute to self-consciousness. In order to realise these intuitions we need, according to Novalis, a poetic vision of the self beyond the dichotomies of subject and object, spiritual and physical, conscious and unconscious. This poetic individual must unite the currently polarised characteristics of existence that are expressed in the dichotomies of mind and world, subject and object, reason and

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[36] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.79.
[37] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.105.
[38] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.96.

emotion, spirituality and physicality, and activity and passivity.

This is possible, Novalis claims, because all aspects of human nature are continuous with each other and the rest of existence; only overidentifying with consciousness makes us experience ourselves as fragmented and set over and against the rest of the world. Furthermore, not only is everything in fact connected, but it can appear as such to human beings on certain interpretations. Because they have one essence, all objects and events have a similar internal structure or meaning – they are analogies of each other. As a result, every object or event can signify all others, and, through imaginative association, each can be learned about and spoken about by reference to these others.[39] This analogical relationship between the essence, meaning, or inner structure of phenomena obtains not only between physical entities, but also between these entities and the divine, which is symbolised by the things of the world.[40] By revealing the divine, objects and events mediate knowledge of and closer relationship to the spiritual essence of all things. A certain kind of symbolisation or representation is thus the means to a closer realisation of divine unity. The task is to bring to explicit awareness the intuitions of the unified, divine nature of the universe that are possible on the basis of unconscious connections with the rest of the world.[41]

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[39] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I pp.79–80.

[40] „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.440–42 #73–74/pp.441–43 #74–75.

[41] Alison Stone highlights a dispute between Manfred Frank and Frederick Beiser about whether Novalis thinks knowledge of the absolute is possible. According to Stone, Frank's claim that it is not possible is based on the early *Fichte Studies*, while Beiser's claim that it is possible is based on the later *Allgemeine Brouillon*. This allows Stone to claim that Novalis' work develops from an early denial of knowledge of the absolute to a later endorsement of such (albeit imperfect) knowledge. I believe these differences to be due to differences of emphasis and terminology. Novalis claims we can know the absolute, but that this knowledge is never complete. Depending on whether you emphasise the first or the second point in the last sentence, and whether you think Novalis sees the absence of adequate discursive knowledge as allowing knowledge of some form or not, you get, respectively, a model that allows knowledge of the absolute or that maintains that the absolute cannot be known. On my account, Novalis' later work develops, rather than contradicts, his earlier work. See Beiser, *The romantic imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfange der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997); Stone, "Being, knowledge, and nature in Novalis," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 141–63; Stone, "Romantic and idealist conceptions"; also Millán-Zaibert, "Borderline philosophy?"; Dalia Nassar, "Reality through illusion: Presenting the absolute in Novalis," *Idealistic Studies* 36 (2006): 27–45.

2.5 Approaching divine self-knowledge

Because the universe, as divine, is both one and infinite, Novalis maintains that this task can never be completed, and the goal is not therefore to become actually completely unified with the divine, but a regulative ideal of drawing ever closer to this union. The approach is characterised by spirit's increasingly adequate self-expression and self-knowledge in and through the physical world. This occurs through interconnected action and creative contemplation of world and self, which allows the individual simultaneously to shape the world to more closely reflect the spiritual nature that lies within it and her, and to understand its significance as a reflection of herself, and ultimately part of herself. These inner connections are realised through creative interpretation of the events and objects that she encounters. The process begins from the perspective of the subject as which the human being exists under the current frame of interpretation, but moves beyond it to see self and world as mutually reflective embodiments of the same absolute spirit: "The first step will be a look inward, segregative observation of our self. Who stops here gains only half. The second step must be an effective look outward, self-actuating, sustained observation of the external world."[42]

First, introspection reveals to the individual her nature as part of a divine whole, and that in essence she is a reflection of the apparently external world. Self-knowledge is the means by which understanding of the world is gathered: "We dream of journeys through the universe: but is the universe not within us?"[43] Following this realisation, the self-expression of the individual through action, modified in light of this new self-understanding, impresses this realisation on her environment. This activity is also a crucial part of how she comes to know herself, allowing her to create representations not just of the rest of the world, but also of herself as she manifests herself in the physical environment, performing actions that reflect her will in concrete form. Novalis claims these make a "figure", which can be read as an expression of who we are, that is, as an expression of spirit as it is embodied in us.[44] The mind's self-expression in material form is retrieved and

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[42] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.422 #26/p.423 #24.
[43] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.416–18 #17/pp.417–19 #16.
[44] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I pp.79, 82, 102.

made visible and comprehensible as representation.[45]

Novalis maintains that this begins to mend the fragmentation between minds and bodies, spiritual and physical, providing a means of both encountering ourselves as minds and assimilating our physical selves to our thinking selves, in the process spiritualising the physical. By interpreting our actions and physical attributes, as well as those of the rest of nature, the mind appropriates them, repeating them in a spiritual medium while shaping itself as a reflection of these latter. A character in *The Novices of Saïs* exclaims, in refutation of those who believe they can know nature through discursive reason alone:

> Do they not recognise in nature the true impression of themselves? [....] [The awakened man] moves out into the infinite, to be ever more unified with himself and his creation around him, and sees with each step the eternal omnipotence of a high, moral world-order, the citadel of his I, emerge ever more brightly. [....] Whoever, therefore, wants to attain knowledge of nature, uses his moral sense, acts and develops in accord with the noble kernel of his innerness, and as if spontaneously nature will open herself before him.[46]

This mutual reflecting of mind and world, that is, of representations and physical things, is how the divine comes to self-consciousness, and the purpose for which it originally differentiated itself into apparently separate elements. The individual engaged in this project is thereby the means by which the absolute acquires self-knowledge: The interpretation of the world and the self as reflecting each other through a shared spiritual meaning touches the real significance of the universe as the self-differentiation of the absolute. The objective is a system of differentiated entities that together are conscious of themselves and each other as manifestations and symbols of the divine: "The complete representation of true spiritual life, raised to consciousness through this action, is *philosophy* kat exochin. Here that *living* reflection develops that with diligent care subsequently expands from itself to an infinite spiritual universe – the kernel or germ of an all-

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[45] In *Henry of Ofterdingen* Novalis depicts an exploration of the world leading to self-knowledge as Henry finds, in a cave, a book reflecting his life (Novalis, „Heinrich," I p.264). See Géza von Molnár, *Romantic vision, ethical context: Novalis and artistic autonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp.48–53, 90; Azade Seyhan, *Representation and its discontents: The critical legacy of German romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.90.
[46] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.90.

encompassing organisation – It is the beginning of a true *self-penetration of spirit* that never ends."[47] By being granted a spiritual meaning by the human being, the world becomes readable as a symbol of the divine, while the human being itself comes into its true vocation: that of realising the spiritual kernel of the universe: "We are on a mission: our vocation is the cultivation of the earth."[48]

2.6 Alienation

The goal of this process is to overcome the alienation resulting from a one-sidedly rational perspective. However, this cannot be accomplished just by getting rid of reason, returning to a pre-reflective, non-discursive relation to existence. For Novalis, human beings are, or rather have become, rational beings, and this reality should and must be reflected in our self-understanding. As I have mentioned, on Novalis' account the purpose of existence is the coming-to-self-consciousness of God, and this occurs most completely in human consciousness. Getting rid of the discursively articulated awareness of ourselves and the world would lose this self-reflectivity and defeat the purpose of the self-differentiation of the absolute and its unfolding in space and time. Thus consciousness, even in its more discursive and abstract forms, is given a high value by Novalis; the problem is the overemphasis on these characteristics, which means that we neglect and become alienated from other important parts of our selves. For this reason we should, according to Novalis, unite intuitions of the divine unity of the world with an articulate, conscious interpretation. The "cultivation of the earth" is accomplished through a dialectical process between intuition and articulation.

Novalis holds that before the rise of scientific reason and emergence of an atomistic, causal world and the human being as subject, human beings, God, and nature existed in greater unity, but also lesser consciousness. Although these periods seem idyllic, because relatively unalienated, the less developed state of intellectual abilities at these times means that they do not fully realise the self-consciousness of God. The images Novalis uses for this situation describe earlier

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[47] Novalis „Logologische Fragmente [I]," in *Schriften*, bd II, pp.525–26 #13.
[48] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.426 #32/p.427 #32.

states of the manifestation of spirit in the world, but also, through analogy and extrapolation, intimate the original position of absolute unity and non-self-awareness that preceded the world. In *Hymns*, he describes a time when human beings lived in communion with nature, identified with their emotions and sensations, and saw the spiritual essence of the world in mythical form in all things: "The ocean's dark, green depths were a goddess' womb. In crystal grottos a voluptuous people feasted. Rivers, trees, flowers and animals had human sense. Sweet tasted the wine endowed by a visible fullness of youth – a god in the grapes – a loving, maternal goddess, growing aloft in full, golden sheaves – the sacred intoxication of love a sweet duty to the most beautiful divine woman".[49]

The advent of scientific reason marked the loss of this original community, and of the ability to see spiritual significance in physical objects and mundane events. As a result, human beings have lost their sense of meaning, and things seem to lack value: "The gods disappeared with their following – nature stood forlorn and lifeless. Arid count and strict measure bound her with iron chains. Like dust and air the immeasurable bloom of life disintegrated in dark words. Gone was the adjuring faith, and the all-changing, all-relating heavenly companion, imagination. Unfriendly blew a cold north wind over the frozen field, and the frozen home of wonders evaporated into the ether."[50] Note the loss of imagination associated with this change: knowledge becomes objective, static, unitary, and unidirectional, rather than subjective, fluid, and creative. The result is the world as it appears to one-sided reason: a mechanistic universe that allows a detailed understanding of physical processes, but without meaning and unimbued by spirit. In this new world, aspects of the universe once perceived as divine are explained on a new, exclusively physical model, while the divine has left the world and is seen to have a separate existence at a remove from the physical: "Heaven's distances filled up with glowing worlds. Into the deeper sanctuary, into the soul's higher realm the world's soul drew up with its powers".[51]

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[49] Novalis, „Hymnen," I pp.141–42 s.5; see also „Lehrlinge," I pp.83–86.
[50] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.145 s.5.
[51] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.145 s.5.

Novalis describes the inhabitants of this new, cold, alien universe as those who, "spurned by all had matured too early and become defiantly estranged from the blessed innocence of youth".[52] Because they do not realise that the divine underlies everything, despite all their knowledge of physics and biology these people do not understand themselves or their world. As a result, the universe can seem futile, amoral or even unjust, and valueless. Life can seem to have no direction or value, leaving human beings without motivation for their actions or a goal to aim for and to provide a standard by which to measure the course of their lives. Things are left in the state of fragmentation and alienation in which they exist according to discursive reason, instead of being raised to a greater level of spirituality and communion.

2.7 Satisfaction

For Novalis, for whom worldly things are meant to be a medium for spiritual self-realisation, one problem with this attitude is that it conceals the capacity of the physical to participate in this vocation. Worldly objects and events, rather than promoting awareness of and closer union with spirit, become a distraction that prevents the individual from viewing the world as a manifestation of the divine: "Philistines live only an everyday life. The main tools seem to be their only purpose. They do everything for the sake of earthly life."[53] Without being invested with their real, divine meaning, mundane goals and activities are only a way of filling up the space of meaning left empty by the flight of the spiritual from the world. One's energies are directed to fulfilling self-interested and limiting desires; there is no impetus to self-improvement or a higher purpose. Thus Novalis thinks the overemphasis on consciousness and rational explanation undermines morality and leads to a nihilistic obsession with trivial things.

Novalis' tone indicates that his readers are expected to be dismayed by the obsession with the mundane demonstrated by these "Philistines". He thinks his audience is aware on some level that there is a meaning for life and a human

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[52] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.145 s.5.
[53] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.446 #76/p.447 #77.

vocation that are currently neglected. The sense of dissatisfaction he thinks many people experience with their way of life is an indication of this alienation from their true nature and vocation, and shows that they sense that things are otherwise than presented by scientific reason. In other words, despite the prevailing construction of the human being as a unit separate from the rest of the world, our real nature as united with the universe through a shared spirit remains; we sense it at some level; and we will not be satisfied until we are working to realise it.

2.8 The dialectic of reason and intuition

Although human beings cannot completely reunite themselves with the divine in this life, taking up their vocation and working towards a closer connection with God will, according to Novalis, reveal the genuine value of the world, including human existence. In doing so, this project responds to the sense of absence of meaning that leaves human beings feeling isolated and lost. By creating representations of the world that increasingly bring the separated elements of spirit closer together and reveal them as parts of the same unity, the interpretive activity that Novalis advocates both recognises and reduces the divisions that it posits within existence.

Reason's divisive and segregating activity is instrumental in achieving this self-reflective unity. Without the individuation and isolation this engenders, spirit would remain in a state of chaotic, blind identity with itself. The differentiation and coming to self-consciousness of the divine occurs gradually through time, as the world manifests increasing particularisation, accompanied, at least ideally, by increasing unification. Greater individuation and integration with the whole are both necessary to increasing the self-knowledge of the divine: "The way of approximation is assembled out of incremental progressions and regressions. Both retard, both accelerate, both lead to the goal."[54] Thus Novalis sees the divisive and alienating overemphasis on discursive reason as an antithesis to a preceding state of the world that was less rational and more unified. This overly rational antithesis prepares the ground for a synthesis into a more complex, self-conscious organic

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[54] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.456 #98/p.457 #99.

whole: "We want to gratefully shake the hands of these scholars and philosophers; because this delusion must be exhausted for the good of their successors, and the scientific view of things be made valid. Poesie becomes more alluring and more colourful, like a jewelled India opposite the cold, dead Spitzbergen of this armchair understanding."[55] Novalis gives several formulations for the process of increasing differentiation and self-aware relation of the parts, for example:

> The raw, discursive thinker is the scholastic. The true scholastic […] builds his universe out of logical atoms – he destroys all living nature in order to place a piece of artificial thought in its place – his goal is an infinite automaton. Opposed to him is the raw, intuitive poet. [….] He hates rules and firm shapes. A wild, violent life rules in nature – everything is animated. No law – arbitrariness and wonders everywhere. He is purely dynamic.
> Thus the philosophical spirit is active first in fully separate materials.
> On the second level of culture these materials begin to touch […T]hus eclectics now emerge without number. [....]
> The third level is scaled by the artist, who is tool and genius at the same time. He finds that each original separation of absolute philosophical activity is a deeper-lying separation of the absolute essence – whose existence rests on the possibility of their mediation – of their connection. He finds that, as heterogeneous as these activities are, nonetheless he discovers a capacity in himself to pass over from one to the other, to change his polarity as he likes – He thus discovers in himself the necessary parts of his spirit – he realises that both must be united in a common principle.[56]

In "Christendom or Europe" Novalis shows this process at work by giving an example of a situation that is more individualised, rational, and self-aware than in that described in *Hymns*, marking a development in the progress towards greater consciousness. Novalis describes this situation as "beautiful luminous times, when Europe was a Christian land, when *one* Christendom inhabited this human-formed part of the world; *One* great common interest bound together the most distant provinces of this wide spiritual kingdom."[57] He proclaims:

> How beneficial, how fitting, this government, this establishment, was to the inner nature of human beings is shown by the powerful aspiration of all human strengths, the harmonious development of all assets; the formidable heights that single human beings reached in all subjects of the sciences of

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[55] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III p.520.
[56] Novalis, „Logologische Fragmente [I]," II pp.524–55 #13.
[57] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III p.507.

> life and of art, and the everywhere blooming commerce with spiritual and
> earthly wares, in the compass of Europe and out to farthest India.[58]

The harmony of medieval Europe as depicted by Novalis, combined with its greater levels of education and social differentiation compared to the pagan age described in *Hymns*, is intended to demonstrate how greater particularity can be integrated in an organic whole, allowing an increase in consciousness and intellectual activity while retaining a unified whole and a connection to spirit.

Novalis does not present these images as factual accounts, but as abstracted views of history, meant to exemplify the progression from unconscious unity through conscious disunity to conscious unity. This progression takes place in a series of stages, each new state of the world repeating the last at a higher level, raising the world towards unity of spirit as self-conscious communion with itself. Thus self-awareness and individuality in the pagan age of the *Hymns* exist at a low level, but there is a great degree of experienced unity with all things, while "Christendom or Europe" describes a more self-aware and individualised situation, though one that still manifests unity, now at a more conscious and articulated level. At each level spirit's consciousness of itself and ability to embody complex interrelationships between its parts is enhanced.[59]

Due to the fact that self-awareness itself requires a degree of distance between subject and object, this process can never be perfectly fulfilled. The project of making explicit unconscious, emotional connections with the rest of the world cannot be completed. The goal is therefore development towards simultaneously greater unity and greater knowledge of the world and the self, the perfection of which – that is, the full self-consciousness of the absolute through human beings – can only be a regulative ideal.

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[58] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III p.509.

[59] Although the above examples are from different works, it is noteworthy that medieval Christendom appears as a quite highly differentiated yet unified state of the universe, while the pagan world figures as unified but relatively unselfconscious. For Novalis, Christianity is a more rational, individual, and intellectual interpretation of existence than pre-Christian religions (Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.440–42 #73/pp.441–43 #74).

2.9 Reconciliation in life and death

2.9.1 Alienation, death, and reconciliation

Although not bringing about a complete overcoming of alienation, the project of self-reflection that Novalis describes alleviates the various aspects of alienation that I have outlined in several ways. First, by revealing the fundamental spirituality of all nature it overcomes the fragmentation of the self caused by a vision of the human being as a mind-body duality, and the alienation that results from viewing the body as, unlike the mind, subject to heteronomous forces. Second, it allows human beings to appropriate their physical attributes by perceiving these as embodiments of the mind and bringing them within the mind as representations. Third, it allows human beings to appropriate the physical world at large in the same way: as a manifestation of spirit and a reflection of the mind, physical appearances are not alien to the self, but part of its identity. Fourth, doing so both spiritualises the physical objects and events that are interpreted and allows mental events to be more consciously and effectively realised in physical form, shaping the spiritual-rational and physical-emotional to better reflect one another. Fifth, seeing things in this way means that we understand ourselves as intrinsically one with nature as the divine, and sixth, this allows us to realise our vocation of mediating the rifts between the world, ourselves, and God. Finally, understanding the mutually reflective nature of self and world allows these to be seen as positive and valuable entities, because such an understanding constructs both as spiritual, and as having value as such. As a result, the sense of meaninglessness and loss of value are removed. Novalis' model thus suggests ways of mitigating the separations between things that he believes have emerged on various levels as a result of individuation and consciousness as well as the sense of confusion and terror due to the loss of meaning and direction that he believes stems from an overemphasis on these characteristics of life.

Nonetheless, Novalis does not offer a full solution to alienation, since the human being remains a conscious individual, and therefore, on Novalis' account, continues to experience itself to a certain degree as separate from the rest of the world and God. Novalis acknowledges that the differentiation of the absolute into

individual entities in order to experience self-relation and self-knowledge entails separation (see 2.6), and the emergence of consciousness further requires divisions between subject and object and mind and world. Novalis describes a self in development towards both greater unity and greater self-knowledge, asymptotically approaching a unified state of being, but it is not completely immersed in the absolute. In other words, Novalis' account includes a double bind: as long as human beings are conscious, as long as they know and represent and act in their world, there is a distance between them and other things, and between these and the absolute unity that underlies them. There is no perfect knowledge or complete connection of the individual with the divine; we cannot reconstruct the universe to reflect divine unity without it losing its ability to be conscious of itself.[60]

For Novalis, full unification with the divine, and hence the complete overcoming of alienation, only takes place in death. This is why he does not see death as the end or an escape from life; it is an end of consciousness and the individual, but not of one's existence, because one is, more essentially than an individual thinking being, part of the whole. Thus Novalis claims "Death is a self-overcoming",[61] and "Death is beginning and ending at the same time, separation and closer self-bonding at the same time. Through death the reduction will be completed."[62] The project of realising our basic unity with an all-encompassing, eternal, divine whole, that is, the most fundamental and essential project of human nature, is not truncated by death, but completed in it. Novalis explicitly connects the task of mutually reflecting the self, the world, and God with fulfilment in death: "We do not know the depths of our spirit. – The secret way goes inwards. Eternity with its worlds, the past and future, is in us or nowhere. The external world is the shadow world, it throws its shadows in the realm of light. Now

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[60] "We abandon the *identical* in order to represent it" („Fichte-Studien," in *Schriften*, bd II, p.104 #1). Novalis here radicalises Fichte's first principle, A=A, by noting that even this expresses non-identity, i.e., involves analysis, separation, and comparison, rather than simple identity, which would be better conveyed by the simple claim "a". See Götze, "Das praktische Ich," p.141; Iber, "Frühromantische Subjektkritik"; Millán-Zaibert, "Borderline philosophy?"; Schanze, "Das kleine Buch," p.171; Violetta L. Waibel, "Fichte, Hardenberg, Sartre und die Freiheit," *Fichte-Studien* 35 (2010): 151–88; Wanning, "Statt Nicht-Ich – Du!" pp.155, 160.

[61] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen," II p.414 #11.

[62] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.416 #15/p.417 #14.

admittedly it seems inwardly so dark, lonely, shapeless, but how completely otherwise will it seem to us when this darkening is past and the body of shadow is wrenched away. We will delight more than ever, because our spirit has been lacking."[63] He describes the state of union with the divine that occurs after death:

> Heavenlier than any sparkling star seem the infinite eyes that the night has opened in us. [...W]ithout need of the light they see through the deeps of a living mind – which fills a higher space with inexpressible voluptuousness. Praise the queen of the world, the high prophet of holy worlds, the curator of holy love – she sends you to me – tender beloved – sweet sun of the night, – now I wake – because I am yours and mine – you heralded the living night to me – made me human – feed on my body with spiritual fervour, so I mix myself airily, more deeply with you, and then the wedding night lasts forever.[64]

The overemphasis on conscious experience that constructs the self as an individual subject presents death as annihilation – as a terrifying destruction of everything we value. Understanding the world as fundamentally divided into independently existing individual entities confounds the project of investing life with meaning by presenting it as transitory, inviting questions about the ultimate point of any of one's projects or of existence as a whole. Such a view also undermines attributing a positive value even to this flow of transient beings and events insofar as it presents life as a whole as destructive and ultimately negative. Novalis' view of the universe as a unity is opposed to this kind of negation of existence, as well as to the atomistic and static model that it presupposes:

> Nature is the enemy of eternal possessions. It annihilates according to firm laws all signs of ownership, destroys all features of formation. The earth belongs to all generations; each is entitled to everything. [….] If, however, the body is a possession, through which I gain only the rights of an active citizen of the earth, then I cannot lose myself through the loss of this property. I lose nothing but the place in this school for sovereigns, and step into a higher corporation, where my beloved schoolmates will follow me.[65]

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[63] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.416–18 #17/pp.417–19 #16; see also „Hymnen," I pp.131–33 s.1.
[64] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.133 s.1.
[65] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," p.416 #14/p.417 #14.

For Novalis, then, overemphasis on calculative reason makes death into an ending that renders life valueless, obscuring death's true meaning as a gateway to reconciliation with spirit and an invitation to begin this project of reconciliation while we are alive.

Novalis' celebration of death does not entail that he values as superior to human existence the reunification with the divine and final overcoming of alienation that is only possible with the loss of individual consciousness. If the purpose of the universe is to allow the self-knowledge of God, then this end is accomplished not in the reabsorption of all entities in the divine, but in their maximal differentiation-in-relation, that is, as I will argue in the next chapter, in a community of conscious, communicating individuals, united by their mutual engagement in a project of creating themselves as increasingly unified and spiritual. This situation cannot be conceived as a static state-of-affairs, however: there is no point at which divine self-awareness is finally accomplished. Rather, the entire process of individuation and relation is valuable. Life has value as the place where God is self-conscious; and death has value as the promise of reconciliation with the absolute; the ultimate value is in the movement through one towards the other. Thus Novalis reclaims death as an integral part of existence without devaluing life as the site of individual experience.

2.9.2 Life and reconciliation

Novalis' revaluation of death has benefits for individuals while alive. In the first place, his understanding of the universe and the self gives these an important value as the self-revelation of God. Furthermore, although, according to Novalis, human beings can never experience themselves and the universe as completely one with the divine, they can have an intimation of this spiritual unity before death, and so overcome some aspects of their alienation from the absolute even while alive. Novalis argues that prior to death we can have a foretaste of this final unification in various forms, including dreams, drug- or alcohol-induced meditations, imagination, intuition, our sense of connection with other human beings, and visions such as Novalis had on Sophie's grave:

> Holy sleep – do not too seldom gladden in this earthly daily task the ones dedicated to the night. Only fools mistake you and are not aware of sleep as the shadow that you, in each twilight of the truthful night, compassionately cast upon us. They do not feel you in the golden flow of the grapes – in the wonderful oil of the almond tree, and in the brown juice of the poppy. They do not know that it is you that hovers around the breast of the tender girl and makes her womb heaven – do not guess that from old stories you, heaven-opening, meet [us] and bear the key to the abodes of the holy, to the infinite secrets of silent messengers.[66]

This foretaste does not merely promise future reconciliation with the divine, but pervades one's life and changes the way one experiences events. Novalis claims that "Death is the romanticising principle of our life. Death is – life +. Through death life is strengthened."[67] Wilhelmine Sepasgorian describes this romanticisation of life through orienting oneself to death as a penetration of the here and now with the transcendent: "The earthly was enriched and broadened through consciousness of the dimension of the beyond."[68] Klaus Ziegler argues that Novalis sees reorientation to death as making death a principle of life instead of a transcendent, radically different state: "the not-being of death stops representing an ungraspable 'beyond' of earthly existence. It becomes a most powerful shaping principle, an unmediatedly graspable content of real life itself. Death not as end, as denial, but as a specific kind and form of life".[69] In other words, understanding the universe as the self-realisation of the divine, and death as the culmination of this process in reunification, both changes the way one lives and reveals death as continuing and completing life's purpose rather than nullifying it. According to Ziegler, Novalis recasts death and the beyond not as transcending the empirical world, but as lived experiences that are the organic consequence and completion of life. The unfolding of the absolute in the material universe is fulfilled in its final reunification as death, which already permeates everyday existence in kernel form and can be brought out more fully through an altered stance towards experiences. In short, reorienting oneself towards death

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[66] Novalis, „Hymnen," II pp.133–34 s.2.
[67] Novalis, „Fragmente und Studien," III p.559 #30.
[68] Sepasgorian, *Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip*, p.81; see also p.57. According to Sepasgorian, Novalis inherits this notion from the pietistic tradition.
[69] Klaus Ziegler, „Die Religiosität des Novalis im Spiegel der Hymnen an die Nacht," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 70 (1948–49): 310; see also pp.301, 302, 310.

reveals the supposedly transcendent – that is, death – as immanent in life, as the spiritual dimension of physical existence.

2.10 Concluding remarks: Death, power, and the other

In addition to prefigurations of unification, the promise of reunification with one's loved ones, and the sense of value one has as a part of the unfolding of the divine, Novalis suggests that this altered interpretation of the universe is accompanied by magical powers over oneself, others, and the world. For example, his character Fable acquires mysterious knowledge, communicates with animals, changes the forms and identities of other characters, and eventually escapes the death planned for her by the fates.[70] The knowledge and ways of being that emerge from the project Novalis advocates not only provide comfort in the face of death, but also allow the self to appropriate as part of herself elements of existence normally perceived as external to her, and hence to bring these under her influence. The next chapter argues that Novalis' ideal for affirming existence involves a participatory model of activity, freedom, and power based on identification with the other (both other human beings and the other of nature) that subverts notions of mastery and isolation that attend a conception of freedom as autonomy.

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[70] Novalis, „Heinrich," I pp.296–311.

Chapter 3 Community I: Creativity, the poetic self, and the other

3.1 Introduction

In addition to providing a means of affirming existence in all its transience, changeability, painfulness, and opacity, Novalis is concerned with discovering a new identity for the self in light of the dissolution of pre-Enlightenment models of the cosmos and the human vocation. In this chapter, I argue that this new identity, which I call the "poetic self", is constructed with others in a dialogical community engaged in realising their relationship to the divine.

As I described in the last chapter, on Novalis' account, insofar as human beings grant a spiritual meaning to the world, the world becomes readable as a symbol of the divine, while the human being comes into its vocation of realising the spiritual kernel of the universe.[71] The continuity of this concept with some Christian models of the human vocation as mediator of the divine and the mundane is clear. However, for Novalis the description of the human being as mediator is founded on pantheism, and for this reason modifies many traditional expressions of this idea. The mediation of the spiritual to the world is for Novalis only possible because the world is fundamentally already spiritual – already God. Thus the mediation that human beings accomplish is not a union of two originally or inherently different realms, but the realisation of a pre-existing inner essence of the world.[72] It appears to be the former only on an atomistic, dualistic interpretation of the universe, which presents earthly things as individual and separated from God. This divisive interpretation is what the poetic self should

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[71] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.426 #32/p.427 #32.

[72] For Novalis, the world has a dual nature as divine and unified on the one hand, and physical and fragmented on the other. We exist simultaneously as individuals and as the absolute; as alienated from the absolute and as having this divine nature as our innermost being. Benjamin Crowe puts the relationship in quasi-Hegelian terms: "The relationship between ideal and real is [...] like that which obtains between a plan and an actual building. [....] When built according to the plan, the building, or the visible universe, evidences a kind of order or coherence. This, in turn, allows for a mediated awareness of the original plan as instantiated by the building. Similarly, the coherence and order of the world, when viewed through the 'moral organ', expresses or points to the divine order on which it rests" ("On 'the religion of the visible universe': Novalis and the pantheism controversy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16 [2008]: 137). This interpretation expresses the goal-oriented aspect of Novalis' vision of the relationship of the mundane to the divine, as well as their analogical correspondence, but does not capture the way in which the divine is, for Novalis, already the basic reality of the mundane.

overcome, and in this way reconstruct the world as spiritual, and herself as part of a spiritual community with which she ultimately identifies.

As I argue below, the creation of this spiritual world and new human identity is closely connected with self-revelation to others, and to this purpose requires shaping an authentic community. I have described how, according to Novalis, there are two ways of understanding representations: one that perpetuates and reifies the alienation of self, world, and God, and one that undermines the distance between these and thereby reduces alienation. The first is the attitude of scientific reason, which sees representations as more-or-less accurate reflections of a pre-existing, stable reality. The second is a "poetic" or "romantic" attitude, which understands the contingency, subjectivity, and partiality of any conception of the universe, and which is therefore motivated to improve these. This romantic attitude is not a raw, merely emotional or intuitive attitude towards experiences, but is articulate, and informed, shaped, and mediated by consciousness.

The task is to articulate and communicate an intuitive grasp of the divine whole or, in other words, to create representations that reveal to others the mutually reflective and interconnected nature of mind and world, inviting them to share this interconnected way of being. The unity of existence cannot be realised alone, imposed upon a world that resists or is unaware of this unity; others must share in understanding and creating this new way of being. Thus the development of this altered worldview depends on the placement of the individual within a community that works together on this project. Integrating into self-awareness aspects of existence that apparently transcend the individual requires overstepping the boundaries between self and other, creating a sense of unity and embodying the shared selfhood that underlies apparent individuality.[73]

3.2 Poetic interpretation

Poetic interpretation is for Novalis the means by which the individual calls the rest of existence to participate in its spiritualisation and unification. By

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[73] Novalis describes experiences of identity with others in the unification with the beloved in *Hymns* and the swapping of identities in Klingsohr's tale („Hymnen," I p.133 s.1; „Heinrich," I p.296). These are ideals, but can be prefigured and approximated in shared creative interpretation.

interpreting herself and the world as embodying the divine, the poetic self (partially) overcomes the dichotomy between the mundane and the spiritual – but not alone, as an autonomous subject; instead, this process subverts usual notions of creativity and interpretation. Novalis presents artistic creation as the construction of significance on the basis of what is given in nature. He refers to this spiritualisation of the world as "raising", "raising to a higher power", or "romanticising": "The world must become romantic. Thus one finds again the original sense. Romanticisation is nothing but a qualitative potentiation. In this operation the lower self is identified with a better self. [….] Insofar as I give the common a high sense, the usual a secret aspect, the known the worth of the unknown, the finite an infinite appearance, I romanticise it".[74]

By perceiving naturally occurring objects and events in a spiritualised, rational way, i.e., by creating order and meaning for these objects and events, the artist imparts spirit to them. That is, she allows their spiritual significance to shine forth in her creations:

> As the painter sees visible objects with totally different eyes from the common man – so the poet also experiences the events of the outer and inner world in a very different way from ordinary human beings. Nowhere, however, is it more noticeable that it is only spirit that poeticises objects, the changes of matter, or that the beautiful, the object of art is not given to us or lies already finished in appearances – than in music. All tones that nature brings forth are raw – and spiritless – often only to the musical soul does the sound of the forest – the piping of the wind, the song of the nightingale, the plashing of the brook seem melodious and meaningful.[75]

The spiritual essence of things "is not given to us nor can it be found ready in phenomena"; rather, it is imparted to phenomena by, or better, through, the artist.

Novalis thinks poetry is the exemplary way in which the world can be romanticised.[76] For this reason, I refer to an individual engaged in the process of spiritualising the world as a "poetic self". Poetry, Novalis believes, presents the divine as essential to its object, revealing the spiritual unity that underlies all

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[74] Novalis, „Logologische Fragmente [II]," in *Schriften*, bd II, p.545 #105.
[75] Novalis, „Anekdoten," II pp.573–74 #226.
[76] Novalis, „Anekdoten," II p.568 #207, „Logologische Fragmente [II]," II pp.533–36 #31–51. For Novalis poeticisation also occurs in translation, mathematics, language, art, and art criticism.

seemingly particular things and, as a result, mediating awareness of the divine. Poetic interpretations represent the spiritual essence of their objects while importing the personal and emotional understanding of the interpreter into their description. As a result, spirit is imparted to the poetic creation not only insofar as the object of the poem is represented as spiritual, but also insofar as spirit, embodied in the poet, is active in shaping that subject-matter. In constructing interpretations that articulate a vision of the mundane as essentially spiritual, poetry unifies discursive reason and unconscious elements of existence – including emotional and intuitive aspects of the individual, and the physical world beyond the individual. Poetry reconciles the fragmented and alienated aspects of the self by involving the participation of the emotions as well as the discursively rational side of the mind. A poetic representation is not simply an intellectual model of reality, aiming to adequately describe events and objects. Rather, emotions and intuitions let the poet read the world as divine and use language in an imaginative and symbolic way to represent this divine nature. Poetry, and art generally, evoke an emotional, not just intellectual, response in its audience, and this is crucial to how it conveys the intuitions that have inspired it.

Poetry begins to overcome fragmentation and alienation not only within the individual, but also between the individual and its world. The poet is inspired by things beyond herself and feels herself taken over by something beyond her conscious control, that does not originate within herself but runs through her. "If a spirit appeared to us we would immediately take possession of our own spirituality – we would be inspired, through ourselves and spirit together. – Without inspiration there is no emergence of spirit."[77] Novalis describes this as an influx of love, connoting the creative love that he takes over from Christianity as a characterisation of God and that he sees as permeating all of nature:

> Whose heart does not [...] skip delightedly, when the deepest life of nature in its whole fullness comes to mind! when then that powerful feeling, for which speech has no other name than love and lust, expands in him, like a powerful, all-dissolving mist, and he sinks quivering with sweet fear in the dark, alluring womb of nature, the poor personality is consumed in the

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[77] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.426 #32/p.427 #33.

plunging waves of delight, and nothing remains but a burning point of immeasurable procreativity, a swallowing eddy in the great ocean![78]

As this quote indicates, with its suggestion of the subsumption of the individual in the active sensual forces of the cosmos, physical and emotional aspects of existence are not for Novalis merely depicted in poetry as embodiments of the spiritual; rather, they play an active role in forming these representations. Their construction as passive and lacking in freedom and spirit is overturned. The physical world is, for Novalis, invested with spirit. It is a realm of active forces, whose free, creative energy is denied by the representations provided by a one-sidedly rational picture, which attributes all freedom and creativity to conscious reason and constructs the physical world as a dead realm. Novalis, of course, opposes this interpretation: "Nature would not be nature if it had no spirit, not that single counter-image to mankind, not the essential answer to this mystic question, or the question to this unending answer".[79] The physical world, including the human body, is not something to be overcome and escaped, or at best ruled by reason; it is not opposed to reason or something that in itself separates the individual from a greater unity. Rather, it reflects reason, because it embodies the same spirit: "The sense of the world is reason: it is there for its sake, and if it is now only the arena of a childish, efflorescent reason, it will one day become the divine image of its task, the setting of a true church. Until then, man reveres it as the symbol of his mind, that with him ennobles itself in indeterminable stages."[80]

3.3 Activity and passivity

The participation of the world beyond the individual poet in the creation of poetry is important for Novalis' undermining of the distinction between activity and passivity. The creativity of the poet is not for Novalis the kind of consciously directed activity envisioned by a calculative reason that tries to dominate the

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[78] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.104.
[79] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.99.
[80] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.90.

world and subordinate it to its needs and interests.[81] Rather, it is driven partly by unconscious forces within and beyond the individual, engaging the wider world in its activity. The actions of the poetic self are shaped and informed by the world of which she is a part, so that the spontaneous expression of the artist's spirit that occurs in poetic creation is also a response to what is given. The artist creates her universe at will, apparently spontaneously out of herself, while at the same time representing that universe, allowing it to speak through her.[82] The poet thus provides a forum for the universe to come to expression in a new, higher form.[83]

Because it is a partly unconscious process directed by forces that originate outside the individual, Novalis believes poetic creativity undermines the subject-object distinction and involves the wider world. Because she has, as described above, through introspection and action incorporated the rest of the world into her self, rather than responding to an external world by observing it and then acting in relation to these observations, the actions of the poet respond to the world without conscious intervention: "The sense for poetry [….] represents the unrepresentable. It sees the invisible, feels the unfeelable etc. [….] The poet is truly robbed of his senses – for that reason everything happens within him. He represents in the truest sense *subject object – mind and world*."[84] The poet's spontaneous self-expression is at the same time the expression of the universe with which she is united.

[81] Andrew Bowie points out this marks a turn away from Fichte's model, in which the I tries to conform the not-I to itself; Novalis instead describes a reciprocal influence of self and other (*From romanticism to critical theory: The philosophy of German literary theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.289). See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The literary absolute: The theory of literature in German romanticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p.45.

[82] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.418–20 #22/pp.421 #21.

[83] Similarly, Götze claims the romantics took freedom to be "ek-centric" – that is, to decentre the subject from its activity ("Das praktische Ich," p.140); Krell also claims the active-passive distinction is undermined by Novalis' attention to "contamination" (*Contagion*, p.56).

[84] Novalis, „Fragmente und Studien," III pp.685–86 #671; see also „Anekdoten," II pp.573–74 #226. Mary Strand describes how, for Novalis, attentiveness to the other allows the individual to connect to the rest of the world: "The boundaries between self and other, I and You, are broken down as the subject becomes receptive to the world around him" (*I/You*, p.20). Kneller also views Novalis as trying to capture a sense of selfhood that subverts distinctions between self and other, activity and passivity, using the character Henry as an example: "Heinrich *has* practically no 'psychological profile' – he is rather a world unto himself in which dream, fantasy, and reality blur, or better, in which it makes no difference which is which. Heinrich is a vessel whose only anchor, if it can even be called that, is his own passive subjectivity" ("Romantic conceptions of the self in Hölderlin and Novalis," in Klemm and Zöller, *Figuring the self*, p.140). See also Gail Newman, "Poetic process as intermediate area in Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 26:1 (1990): 16–33.

Rather than entailing loss of autonomy as the individual is engulfed by an overwhelming external world, Novalis views this process as the foundation of real freedom, claiming "Self-relinquishing is the source of all debasement, as well as on the contrary the ground of all true elevation."[85] The artist overcomes the dichotomy between passivity and activity, not only ascribing spirit and life to nature, but also becoming, for the first time, truly free:

> [The painter's] art is the art of seeing as regular and beautiful. Seeing is here totally active – thoroughly formative action. [....] Almost every human being is to a limited degree already an artist – He in fact sees outwards and not inwards – He feels outwards and not inwards. The main difference is this: the artist has activated the germ of self-formative life in his organs – raised the sensitivity of these *for spirit*, and is thereby in the condition to allow ideas to flow out of himself at his pleasure – without external solicitation – to use them as tools to *discretionary* modifications of the real world. By contrast, with non-artists these respond only through the appearance of an external solicitation, and spirit, like inactive material, stands under the basic laws of mechanics, that all changes presuppose an external cause, and effect and countereffect must be commensurate with each other, or it seems to submit to this constraint. It is comforting to know that this behaviour of spirit is unnatural and, like all spiritual counternature, *temporary*.[86]

Unlike the subject of calculative reason, who through her bodily existence as part of the physical world is constrained by events that seem external to her, and who struggles against this to impose her activity on that world, apparently external events are experienced by the poet as part of her self and as part of her activity.[87]

3.4 Language and nature

According to Novalis, it is with the genius that the dichotomy between inner and outer, mind and body, self and other, is most strongly overcome, allowing her to respond to what is apparently given outside her mind and individual body:

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[85] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.422 #26/p.423 #24. Novalis' term *Selbstentäusserung* could be translated "self-alienation." However, he does not mean separation from one's self, but dying to self, in which one's subjectivity is given up in becoming part of a greater whole. As in mainstream Christianity, one is thus reconciled with God.

[86] Novalis, „Anekdoten," II p.574 #226.

[87] Strand also explains Novalis' account of freedom as mutually enabling the freedom of self and other. She notes the expansion of selfhood this enables, as boundaries are stretched and altered, describing this process as "a merging of the inside and outside, subjective and objective worlds and the creation of a multiple, reflecting sub-objectivity" (*I/You*, p.48; see also pp.1, 7, 29, 47).

> Genius says so boldly and certainly what it sees going on within itself because it is not prejudiced in its representation, and therefore the representation is also not prejudiced, but its observation and the observed seem to concur together, to unite themselves freely to one work.
>
> When we speak of the external world, when we portray real objects, then we act like genius. Thus genius is the ability to act towards imaginary objects like real ones, and also to treat them like these.[88]

For Novalis, this is an exemplification and intensification of what human beings always do. All action and understanding involve projecting a world and then acting as if we were really surrounded by the things that we project. The artist, however, has this capacity to a much higher degree: Novalis refers to the artist as "the genius of genius".[89] In other words, artistic activity is a raised form of the everyday human way of being. The world that the genius creates is, due to her intuition and performance of unity with the whole, a free expression of the spirit, unity, and life of the entire universe, including the genius herself as the place where these characteristics are epitomised and come to expression.[90] By speaking and creating, the poetic self allows nature to speak, and therefore speaks in the voice of nature. Novalis explicitly connects the creation of an artwork to a genuine understanding of nature: "Here too the peculiar genius has come on the trail of nature, and schematised it as an artifice."[91] When he speaks and creates, the poet enables nature to speak, and therefore speaks in the language of nature.

For Novalis, nature is a language, albeit one that the human being as subject has forgotten how to read and respond to. The beings and processes that make up the world, including but not restricted to human activity, are symbols of the divine that, like human speech, form an analogy for a hidden spiritual meaning that we can learn to understand.[92] He describes how an earlier people saw themselves reflected in nature and expressed this truth in their speech: "to this earlier humanity everything must have appeared as human, familiar, and companionable,

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[88] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen," II pp.418–20 #22.

[89] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen," II p.420 #22.

[90] Compare Heidegger's notion of human beings as the paradigmatic place where Being emerges.

[91] „Auch hier ist der sonderbare Genius der Natur auf die Spur gekommen, und hat ihr eine artigen Kunstgriff abgemerkt" (Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.424 #27/p.425 #27; see also „Vermischte Bemerkungen" II p.466 #118).

[92] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.79.

the freshest singularity must have been visible in their outlook, each of their expressions was a true expression of nature, and their representations must have accorded with the surrounding world and represented a true expression of the latter."[93] In the new world of scientific reason, the individual is cut off from nature, and nature's language, which speaks of the divine, has become a hidden tongue: "No more was the light the gods' abode or heavenly sign – [the people] threw the veil of night over themselves."[94] However, the poetic self can both read and respond to this language of nature, understanding herself and her world through collaboration with her environment.

In other words, the poet's understanding of her universe and the way that she acts within it take a dialogical form, like the role of one participant in a conversation. She can direct her actions and interpret her experiences, but only in response to what is there already, shaping her words and actions to allow what is already there to be revealed. Thus for Novalis all the actions of the poetic self take place in a universe in which the basis for interpretation is given. The creative activity of the poetic self is not a straightforward autonomous generation of objects, but a generation that works together with what is generated, shaping it and being shaped by it. James Hodkinson describes this as "a polyphonic model of discourse" which is "inclusively intersubjective" – that is, the poet's speech involves not just her own voice, but also those of others, which she both preserves and integrates.[95] The creation of a new, higher universe that this individual accomplishes through interpreting the things she describes is not an imposition of that interpretation on an inert world, but the way that that world expresses itself in a higher, more conscious, and more articulate form.

Novalis takes as the archetype of this activity the novelist, who "from his given crowd of accidents and situations – makes a well-ordered, lawlike series".[96]

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[93] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.83.
[94] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.145 s.5.
[95] James Hodkinson, "The cosmic-symphonic: Novalis, music, and universal discourse," in *Music and literature in German romanticism*, ed. Siobhán Donovan (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), p.13. Angelika Rauch also describes this capacity to appropriate or incorporate other voices without assimilating them (*The hieroglyph of tradition: Freud, Benjamin, Gadamer, Novalis, Kant* [Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000], p.123.
[96] Novalis, „Anekdoten," II p.580 #242.

The freedom and creativity of the author are restricted by the terms given to him, while he draws objects and events together into a coherent whole. A novelist brings "an individual to one purpose through all these accidents, through which he purposefully leads him. He must have a singular individual, who determines events and is determined by them. This exchange, or the changes of a single individual – in a *continuous* series form the interesting material of a novel." Here Novalis explicitly undermines the difference between activity and passivity, stating that the protagonist both "determines events and is determined by them."

This process can be extended to the task of understanding and acting towards the events of one's experiences generally: Novalis maintains that "Ordinary life is full of similar accidents" and "All the accidents of our lives are materials out of which we can make what we want. Whoever has much spirit makes much out of his life."[97] The creativity of the poet depends on openness to the partial shaping of her creations by events that appear to be outside her. In other words, she is engaged in creative dialogue with her surroundings.

3.5 Language and community

For Novalis, the creation of a higher, more spiritual, romanticised world – a world that appears as the self-revelation of the divine – is neither an individual nor a merely mental undertaking, but is carried out through language, interpretation, and activity, which means in communion with others. This includes not just other human beings, but also the "other" of the natural world. The process of raising the world is dynamic and ongoing, and involves the individual in a responsive mutual process of communion and shared creativity with other individuals and the world around her. The experience of the divine only occurs in dialogue with others: "Inspiration is appearance and counterappearance, appropriation and communication together".[98] The affirmation of existence that is available to the poetic self emerges from the joint participation of the fragmented elements of existence in the creation of new ways of life.

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[97] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.424 #27/p.425 #27, pp.436–38 #66/pp.437–39 #66.
[98] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.426 #32/p.427 #33.

As the last section suggested, this dialogue takes place not only between human beings but also between human beings and the natural world. In both cases the ability to engage in this kind of poetic dialogue has temporarily been lost due to the predominance of calculative reason. Novalis claims that, like our usual understanding of nature, human language, as we currently tend to understand it, promotes the divisive, dichotomising, and alienating structures of this calculative reason. In order to use language to undermine these structures, a change in language and/or in one's attitude towards it is required.

According to Novalis, language allows the world to be represented in a conscious medium. As mentioned above, despite a degree of necessary separation entailed by the relationship of sign and signified, this brings the world and the mind closer together by allowing them to better reflect one another. The wedge driven by scientific reason between mind and world and between these and the absolute is partly a result of misunderstanding the way language signifies. Novalis believes that it does so based, not on semantic rules for connecting terms to objects, but on the imagination. Words have meaning as a result of the ability of language-users to creatively interpret them. Like the relationship between the human being and its world, and between these and the divine, the connection between linguistic utterances and the things they signify is not one of simple reference from one separate entity to another, but of analogy between realms that at a deeper level share a common structure or essence:

> If one could only make it comprehensible to people that it is with language like with mathematical formulae – they constitute a world for themselves – they play only with themselves, embody nothing but their wonderful nature, and just for that reason they are so expressive – just for that reason they reflect in themselves the same play of relations as things. Only through their freedom are they constituents of nature and only in their free movements do they express the world-soul and make it into a tender scale and ground-plan of things. It is also like that with language – whoever has a fine feeling for its application, its pulse, its musical spirit, whoever hears in himself the tender effects of its inner nature, and thereafter moves his tongue or his hand, he will be a prophet[.][99]

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[99] Novalis, „Monolog," in *Schriften*, bd II, p.672.

Novalis believes a discursive or scientifically rational account of language misses how language constitutes a new world that simultaneously embodies the mind that creates it, the world it describes, and the divine that lies behind these, instead viewing these as fundamentally separate and related to each other only extrinsically. It represents the world as divided into separate entities that stand over and against the subject, and that can be grasped adequately by a one-to-one correspondence between words and things.[100] The purpose of truthful speech appears, misleadingly, to be to communicate data about previously given objects and events, and the way these things are shaped through language is obscured.

According to Novalis, in order to allow language to mediate the divine the audience must use their imagination to recreate the object of speech. In other words, the truthfulness of language does not depend on agreement with the world, but on the participation of the audience and their connection of the words with their own intuitions and experiences. In fact, for Novalis a sincere attempt to communicate does not depend on the truth as it is usually understood. Instead, it attempts to share the intuitions of the speaker about its object with its audience, without insisting on the correctness of the terms used to make this communication. For example, a character in *The Novices of Saïs* argues that "the illegible, strangely mixed words" of artistic expression are valuable means of steering others to grasp one's insights, and should be revered "beside the magnetic needle, which never loses its bearings and has led countless ships across the pathless oceans to the inhabited coasts and harbors of the fatherland."[101]

For Novalis, reality always escapes articulation, and a search for the essence of things can therefore never be finished; progress in this search depends on openness and readiness for revision. Language can be used to this purpose. In failing to represent its object completely through literal denotation, language invites the audience to provide more satisfactory linguistic constructions, especially where it explicitly acknowledges this failure. Just after the long passage cited above, Novalis does just this, stating, "If I thereby think to have indicated

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[100] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," p.512.
[101] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," I p.102.

the essence and function of poetry in the clearest way, still I know that no one can understand it, and I said something totally absurd, because I wanted to say it, and so no poetry comes about."[102] In pointing to the inadequacy of his speech, taken literally, Novalis invites his audience to reach beyond the words to grasp his meaning, and provide a better representation of it. The audience is called to create a yet more spiritualised version of the world by investing the objects and events described by language with their own thoughts and feelings.[103]

3.6 Sincerity, openness, and truth

For Novalis, the search for a new way of being and understanding involves self-expression, fundamentally self-revelation to others. This self-communication is most effective, not when it is the most accurate, but when it is most inviting of engagement and revision by its audience. Genuine self-expression does not speak the truth, in the form of literal, objective statements, but invites others to create their own way of understanding the speaker. It does so by highlighting the partiality of these self-expressions and one's awareness of what one omits or fails to accurately capture of oneself and one's world when one speaks and acts. Irony and poetic techniques like metaphor, suggestion, and association emerge as tools for a sincere understanding of the world and oneself, for the revelation of these to others, and indeed for the mutual construction of these through creative dialogue.

In this respect, Novalis' work can be seen as a counter-tendency to a concept of truth as requiring accuracy, clarity, and freedom from error. Novalis' emphasis on the subjective, created nature of reality runs against the insistence of scientific reason on univocity and the givenness of objects. It suggests on the contrary that an authentic attitude towards understanding ourselves and the world recognises the impossibility of capturing reality in representations, and for this

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[102] Novalis, „Monolog," II p.672.

[103] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.426 #32/p.427 #32–33). Novalis describes things that stimulate individuals to their own intuitions as "seeds," claiming that sowing these is the task ahead: "The art of writing books has not yet been invented. It is, however, on the point of being invented. Fragments of this kind are literary seeds. There may admittedly be some deaf grains among them: however, if only some bear fruit!" („Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," p.462 #104/p.463 #114). Novalis claims that not just language, but everything we encounter can play this role: "Everything is seed" („Logologische Fragmente [II]," II p.563 #189).

reason holds itself open to further interpretation and improvement. The goal of understanding is not rejected by Novalis, but modified. Instead of the scientific methodology of accurate observation and correct categorisation, performed through discursive reason, the methodology most conducive to self-discovery and discovery of others involves a stance or attitude towards others, the world, and oneself that holds itself open to what is there – that listens, rather than attempts to categorise everything correctly. It is this sincere openness that allows the universe to develop towards full self-knowledge of the absolute.

Novalis suggests that this openness is the means to freedom and the authentic realisation of the human vocation. As Jane Kneller puts it, "in the face of giving up the search for the absolute, or rather, precisely *because* of giving it up, the 'drive to philosophize' can never be satisfied, and there arises an 'unending free activity.'"[104] Self-knowledge and knowledge of the absolute are elusive, constantly under reconstruction: "The free subject is to be understood in a comprehensive way as a thinking, seeing, feeling, perceiving creature, which always finds and knows itself on the borders of incomprehensibility".[105] Violetta Waibel also stresses the importance for Novalis of non-closure, of resisting fixing forms and laws in permanent constellations: "for Hardenberg the loosing of bounds, the consequent putting in question, the going into the open is just as important or even more important than the self-concluding self-determination, the decision for a wherefore, the finding of one's own."[106]

3.7 Creative conversation

The spiral process of introspection and action that Novalis maintains allows the individual to understand herself and her world increasingly as revelations of the divine calls for recognition and witnessing by other individuals. The new, higher world created by poetic interpretation is a shared world constituted in language. In

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[104] Kneller, "Romantic conceptions of the self", p.139; see also Millán-Zaibert, "Borderline philosophy?" p.138;

[105] Kneller, "Romantic conceptions of the self", p.162; see also pp.165, 186.

[106] Waibel, "‚Wechselvernichtung' und ‚freywilliges Entsagen des Absoluten'. Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich von Hardenberg im Dialog." *Internationales Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus* 6 (2009): 207; see also pp.183, 205; Waibel, "Fichte, Hardenberg, Sartre," p.159.

conversation, one speaker presents her interpretation of the world, which is raised to a more spiritual level than its original, uninterpreted form by her activity, and then a second individual works on this representation to understand what is said. By retracing the meaning of the first speaker's utterance, the second participant combines three elements in a higher synthesis: The original situation described by the speaker; the speaker's spirit as imparted to the picture of this situation in her utterance; and his own spirit in his interpretation of this picture. Through this process, a new, romanticised world is created through mutual interpretation:

> The letter is only an aid to philosophical communication, whose intrinsic essence consists in the arousal of a certain line of thought. The speaker thinks produces – the hearer thinks after him [*denckt nach*] – reproduces. The words are a deceptive medium of prophecy [*Vordenckens*] – unreliable vehicle of a certain, specific stimulus. The genuine teacher is a guide. [....]
>   Genuine *collective-philosophising* is therefore a collaborative movement towards a beloved world – in which one spells off alternately in the foremost position[.][107]

The same process of joint, mutually reflective creation characterises the poetic interpretation of nature, which, as I described in 3.4, Novalis understands as like a conversation. Someone who attempts to realise her true vocation is engaged in a conversation with other people and the world around her, through which mutual activity a new, more spiritual, universe is constructed.

3.8 Mediation

For Novalis, connections with other human beings are important precursors of unification with the rest of existence. In addition to the importance of social life and conversation generally for constructing a self in communion with universal spirit, particular figures stand out as especially important for the development of a sense of unity with others, the natural world, and the divine. For example, the teacher in *The Novices of Saïs* initiates the novices into the secrets of the universe, as an exemplar and tutor in the search for the meaning of nature's language. In *Henry of Ofterdingen*, Zulima, who shows Henry how to construct a meaningful

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[107] Novalis, "Logologische Fragmente [I]," II p.522 #3. This is the "symphilosophy" for which Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel are noted.

narrative out of chance events and gives him a musical instrument with which to begin his life as a poet, provides an axial moment in Henry's development.[108] Later, the sage Klingsohr and his daughter Mathilde initiate Henry into further pieces of wisdom required to become aware of his unity with existence, and Mathilde and Henry, who marry, share a union that prefigures the unification of all things.[109] The same prefiguration occurs in the relationship between the narrator and the beloved in *Hymns*: "you heralded the living night to me – made me human – feed on my body with spiritual fervour, that I mix myself airily, more deeply with you, and then the wedding night lasts forever."[110] The beloved, as mediator, communicates about the nature of death, eternity, and the absolute, and stimulates the narrator to desire union with the divine, described in terms of the sublimation of his alienated physical existence into the reconciliation of spirit and body which is the full realisation of his humanity.

Novalis maintains that any object can reveal our union with the rest of existence and mediate the divine, although as human beings become more sophisticated they tend to choose a more limited range of objects to hold religious significance and to select other human beings as those mediating objects: "The more independent the human being becomes, the more the quantity of mediators shrinks, the quality is refined, and his relationships to these become more various and cultured: fetishes, stars, animals, heroes, idols, gods, one God-man."[111] While the natural world reveals the divine, other human beings do so to a greater extent because in relating to the world they invest it with spirit, and therefore present it in their speech and actions as worked on by the mind, and so already partially divinised. In particular human beings we see the highest manifestation of spirit in the world, and when we engage imaginatively with them as symbolic figures, we see how the divine is embodied in the world and draw closer to that divinity. This

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[108] Novalis, „Heinrich," I pp.236–39. On the role of women and the Orient in Novalis' account of self and other, see Strand, *I/You*, and Alice A. Kuzniar, "Hearing women's voices in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 10:5 (1992): 1196–1207.

[109] Novalis, „Heinrich," I pp.284, 287–88.

[110] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.133 s.1.

[111] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.442 #73/p.443 #74. This is an instance of romanticisation. A single human mediator is both more differentiated (because more individual) and more conscious than other mediators, and so better reveals the divine. Thus, if and as the development of self-consciousness progresses, we begin to choose such higher mediators.

is something we cannot do in isolation, owing to the distinction between subject and object that is necessary in order for knowledge to exist: "Nothing is more essential to true religiosity than a mediator, who unites us with the Godhead. Unmediated, the human being can absolutely not be in relation to the latter."[112]

3.9 Community and authenticity

Novalis' model for recreating the self and its world as manifestations of the absolute has a crucial role for community in giving back to life its true value and significance through creative, dialogical interpretation. Nature and society are not opposed; rather, they function together as parts of a universal conversation through which the self-revelation of the divine takes place. The organic unity that Novalis sees as the ultimate expression of divine self-consciousness is created as a society: it is a shared world created in dialogue with others, including both human beings and objects and events in the natural world. Thus for Novalis society is a necessary component of the movement towards discovering our vocation as the place in which the divine comes to self-awareness:

> [O]nly pantheistically does God appear *wholly* – and only in pantheism is God *wholly* everywhere, in every individual. Thus for the great I the ordinary I and the ordinary you are only supplements. Each you is a supplement to the great I. We are not at all I – but we can and shall become I. We are seeds for becoming I. We shall all transform into a you – into a second I – only thereby do we raise ourselves to the Great I – which is *one* and all together.[113]

As conscious individuals, we always experience ourselves as partially alienated from our deeper being as part of God. However, we can partly appropriate our true selves in the earnest attempt to retrieve this inner essence through open communication with other human beings and the world around us.

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[112] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II pp.440–42 #73/pp.443–45 #74.
[113] Novalis, „Das Allgemeine Brouillon," in *Schriften* bd III, p.314 #398.

Chapter 4 Myth I: Religion and myth

4.1 Introduction

In the last two chapters I argued that on Novalis' model the world and the self we encounter are interpretations that, first, to varying degrees reveal the divine, and second, are created not in isolation, but in dialogue with other human beings and the natural world. In other words, all experiences, including those of our selves, are mediated by creative engagement with others. This is the case when the community is a modern, Enlightened community that sees the world as atomistic, causally determined, and characterised by dichotomies, and the self as a subject, or when the community is the unsophisticated group of pagans that Novalis depicts in *Hymns*, who do not have a highly developed intellectual life but experience spontaneous connections with nature, or when the community is an ideal society of articulate, fully conscious poet-scholars who articulate and reflect to each other to the greatest possible degree their knowledge of themselves and the world as unified and divine. In this chapter I argue that the dialogical interactions that characterise the latter kind of community and allow it to reveal the divine should be seen as a project of communal myth-making.

The community that Novalis calls for is engaged in creating a particular kind of shared world, that is, a spiritualised world that reveals the divine in all its relationships and includes a role for human beings as part of the divine nature and the special place where it is self-conscious. Becoming this new self and creating this new world is, as I have described, an ongoing process. No community and no interpretation of either the human being or its environment can fully capture the infinite, spiritual, completely unified nature of the absolute. The representations that we create are never adequate or accurate in the usual sense. Rather, they are creative constructions. In other words, the world and self that we encounter in poetic interpretation are mythical representations of experiences that communicate something of what their creators intuit about the cosmos.

Novalis' account is itself an attempt at such an articulation. We have seen how Novalis explicitly recognises the inadequacy of his expressions of the nature

of things, thereby inviting the reader to use his words as stimuli to their own experiences and intuitions of the absolute, and to revise and improve his account. Novalis sees his work as part of a symphilosophical project: it is an articulation of a truth that others have already attempted to express, which attempts have shaped his own experiences. His account is not isolated, but participates in an ongoing dialogue to create a shared world and a shared, communal self. It is not a first engagement of an independent individual with a virgin, uninterpreted nature; rather, it takes up an existing tradition – one that characterises the community of which Novalis was a part. Novalis' story about the overcoming of self-alienation can be understood as his attempt to perform what he calls a "mythical translation" of Christian traditions. The community he envisages is to be bound together through such a myth, which its members create and recreate as a project of mutual participation and overcoming boundaries towards realising the absolute self that underlies their differentiation into individuals.

4.2 Mythical translation

According to Novalis, "A translation is either grammatical, or modifying, or mythical."[114] The first of these, he tells us, is merely the use of different words to repeat what has already been said, without going beyond the artificial, superficial, categorising structure of discursively rational discourse, and without using one's intuitions to re-engage with the subject matter: "Grammatical translations are translations in the usual sense. They require very much scholarship, but only discursive skills."[115] More important are the other two kinds of translation, which see through the structures of conscious and discursive understanding and transform the world into something that more closely reflects the nature of the absolute. Novalis claims: "To modifying translations belong, if they should be genuine, the highest poetic spirit. [....] The true translator of this kind must in fact be the artist himself, and be able somehow or other to give the idea of the whole

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[114] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.438 #68/p.439 #68. For a detailed account of Novalis' notion of translation, see Kristen Pfefferkorn, *Novalis: A romantic's theory of language and poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp.48–59.
[115] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.438 #68/p.439 #68.

at his discretion. He must be the poet of the poet and therefore be able to speak according to his and the poet's own idea together."[116] In this case, as in conversation and in the poetic interpretation of nature as I described them above, the translator not only remains true to the idea behind the original, and hence to its spirit, but also imports his own spirit into the result.[117]

Novalis claims that mythical translations go even further than this, giving not just the intentions of the artist and translator, but also the "ideal" of the work that the artist was attempting to communicate:

> Mythical translations are translations in the highest style. They represent the pure, perfected character of the individual artwork. They give us, not the real artwork, but the ideal of it. I believe there does not yet exist a complete model of this. In spirit some critiques and descriptions of artworks give bright traces of it. It includes a mind that is steeped in poetic spirit and philosophical spirit in their full abundance. Greek mythology is in part such a translation of a national religion. The modern Madonna is also such a myth.[118]

As we saw above, on Novalis' account the "ideal" that works of art attempt to approximate is the inner divine unity of nature, i.e., God, or the absolute. A perfect representation of complete unity with God would be, he maintains, this unity itself, at which point the subject-object division necessary for representation would break down. A perfect mythical translation of the ideal of divine unity that still mediates awareness of spirit is, therefore, impossible. Consequently, Novalis claims that complete mythical translations do not yet exist, although certain religious myths are steps in the right direction. To the extent that the ideal can be known by us, it is revealed through these hints. The approximations to the complete expression of the artist's spirit (analogous to the mutual representation of mind and world, or the language-use of speaker and audience) that occur in

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[116] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," p.438 #68/p.439 #68.

[117] Novalis' essay "Christendom or Europe" might be seen as an example of a modifying translation of part of the history of Europe. On this interpretation, Novalis' rosy description of medieval Europe does not reveal an unrealistic idea of this history, but differs consciously and deliberately from events as they are usually thought to have occurred in order to reflect Novalis' view of the place of this period in the development of the absolute to self-consciousness. By describing events in idealised terms, Novalis "projects his spirit" onto them, that is, he modifies them to reveal what he sees as their essence or intent and to reflect his input.

[118] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.438 #68/p.438 #68.

modifying translations provide this manifestation of spirit in a more modest form, working on the existing embodiments or translations of the ideal that occur in another person's interpretation.

Novalis seems to have thought of his philosophy and poetry as lying somewhere between modifying translations of Christian concepts and mythical translations of the inarticulable reality behind the latter, that is, the ideal that they attempt to express. In other words, his work is a step on the way to the regulative ideal of a mythical translation of the truth that he thinks is expressed in Christianity, but also functions as a modifying translation of Christian tradition. His work provides new imagery and new meaning for what he views as important and true elements of the Christian religion, transposing these into his own terms. He often provides new mythical elements to communicate these, such as the mysterious, magical characters and events in Klingsohr's tale. The role and status that Novalis accorded Sophie before and after her death as like a saint, goddess, or other mythical being also provides an example of this new myth-making. Despite the novelty of these images, the meanings that Novalis uses them to communicate often resonate as familiar, particularly within a Christian context, dealing with themes of eternal life, union through love, blissful contemplation of the divine, the overcoming of death, the confrontation of free will and fate, and the question whether faith or reason provide a reliable basis for truth.

4.3 Novalis' translation of Christianity

There is not space here to consider in detail the ways in which Novalis' work engages with, or repeats concerns addressed by, the many diverse and sophisticated streams of thought within Christianity, or even for a detailed account of its connections with the pietistic tradition in which Novalis was raised and with which his work resonates most strongly.[119] Instead, I indicate important

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[119] On the influence of pietism on Novalis, see Sepasgorian, *Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip*. Sepasgorian argues that Novalis' work is heavily conditioned by his pietistic upbringing. Pietistic elements in his work, she argues, include much of the vocabulary of the *Hymns* and the *Spiritual Songs*, tropes of Christ as mystical bridegroom and marriage as prefiguring unification with God after death, erotic imagery of death, de-emphasising radical sin, death seen as a gateway to eternal life, the demand to improve the world through good works and transforming human beings to be

aspects of Novalis' philosophy that he draws from Christian traditions and that he aims either to repeat at a "higher" level by giving them a new interpretation or mythical context or to adjust in light of what he considers his own intuitions of the truths behind them. My aim is to show that Novalis saw himself as appropriating Christian truth for himself and for a poetic community. These aspects include his re-imagining of God and the world, alienation and the Fall, salvation, eternal life, and human nature. My analysis suggests that Novalis was operating within a

better members of a community, the emphasis on Sophia as wisdom associated with Christ, belief in earthly love as proof of eternity, and hope for union with God. Benjamin Crowe investigates the confluence of Spinozism and Christianity in Novalis' work and his influence by Plotinus in "Visible universe." An influential account of Novalis' relationship to neo-Platonism is Hans-Joachim Mähl's „Novalis und Plotin. Untersuchungen zu einer neuen Edition und Interpretation des ‚Allgemeinen Brouillon,'" *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochschrifts* (1963): 139–250. Andreas Kubik asks whether Novalis salvages a personal God from his appropriation of Fichtean philosophy, arguing that Novalis sees an anthropomorphic God as an appropriate means of relating to the absolute: „Persönlichkeit Gottes? Die religionsphilosophische Leistung von Hardenbergs Fichte-Rezeption," *Internationales Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus* 6 (2009): 211–26. Florian Roder argues, by contrast, that Novalis sees God as an impersonal, all-encompassing being, in *Novalis. Die Verwandlung des Menschen. Leben und Werk Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1992), p.460. In *Signs of Revolution*, O'Brien makes a case for Novalis' "irreligion", claiming his account is "simply *not* Christian" because for Novalis faith relates to "fictions" (subjective claims that cannot be established conclusively) that deny the universal, objective truth of Christianity (p.218); because Novalis seeks to arouse a religious sense that is not specifically Christian (p.249); and because pantheism is heretical to "orthodox Christianity," especially one that views Christ as one mediator among many (p.250). I argue that Novalis views truth as always only partially graspable and only in subjective ways, discounting O'Brien's first claim, which gives a negative sense to "fictions" that Novalis rejects and obscures their status as for Novalis attempts to articulate knowledge that cannot be adequately represented – a notion familiar to at least some kinds of Christian thought (Carl Paschek and Florian Roder consider the connection of Novalis' work to mysticism in, respectively, "Novalis und Böhme. Zur Bedeutung der systematischen Böhmelektüre für die Dichtung des späten Novalis," *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochschrifts* [1975]: 138–67, and *Die Verwandlung des Menschen*). On the other hand, O'Brien's second and third points, regarding Novalis' broadening of the concepts he believes himself to be adopting from Christianity, are arguably true. However, whether these reject or repeat Christian themes depends on what one views as essential to Christianity: one could reasonably claim that the status of Christ as the only mediator is essential to Christianity; on the other hand, one might view this doctrine as only one possible expression of a deeper truth. Barth lists the doctrine of justification through Christ alone as one of three aspects of Christianity (along with a personal relationship with God and Christian eschatology) that cannot be appropriated for an individualised conception of religion such as Novalis' (Barth, *Protestant theology*, pp.113–120). In *Novalis – Poesie und Geschichtlichkeit* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006), p.336, Mario Zanucchi argues that Novalis broadens, rather than renounces, Christianity, although he also claims that in viewing human beings as essentially God Novalis lays the groundwork for an anthropomorphic reduction of God such as Feuerbach's. Sepasgorian also argues that Novalis wants to broaden the content of Christianity, and claims this is a pietistic aim (p.80). The latter interpretation places Novalis within an established Christian tradition. Given Novalis' understanding of his own work as a manifestation of Christian truth – albeit one modified in its expression – as well as the breadth and variety of historical versions of Christianity, I suggest that it is reasonable to maintain that Novalis' work, while in some respects deviating from many versions of Christian thought, is situated within the Christian tradition, at least broadly speaking.

broadly Christian paradigm, but moving away from transcendent models for understanding and affirming existence towards a response to alienation that rejects the dualism of spirit and matter and grants an important role to others as participating in one's knowledge, experience, and identity.

4.3.1 God and nature

Novalis' claim that the world is a revelation of the divine presents a traditional Christian theme in modified form. Because God is infinite, he is often described in Christianity as present in all parts of the universe, despite the fact that that universe is separated from and less than God, being his creation and lacking his infinitude, necessity, and perfections. As a result, if understood correctly, events and objects can tell us something about God's nature. The latter claim took a particularly elaborate turn in medieval times, when the constellations of objects and events that make up the physical world were seen to have special significance on several levels, including as moral lessons and as indications of the nature of God.[120] Novalis' account of nature as a language is influenced by this model, although, consistently with his conception of language as based on imagination and association rather than denotation or one-to-one correspondence, interpreting the meaning of events is a creative enterprise rather than one that, as in medieval symbolism, can be stated in rules.

Novalis' pantheism also goes further than most Christian accounts prior to and contemporary with his writings insofar as he describes the world as not just a creation and revelation of the divine, but as God himself, manifested in space and time. Novalis was not without precursors in this claim, which became more common as an interpretation of Christianity after the nineteenth century,[121] but at the time pantheism was not a widespread (or generally acceptable) interpretation of Christian doctrine.[122] According to Novalis, the world is not merely God's

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[120] An authoritative account of medieval symbolism can be found in de Lubac, *Medieval exegesis*.
[121] To such an extent that it is the first proposition condemned by Pope Pius IX's 1864 *Syllabus of errors* (Vatican, *Syllabus of errors* [www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P9SYLL.HTM]).
[122] This is still the case today. See Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of heaven and earth: The Christian doctrine of creation in the light of modern knowledge* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1959); Étienne Gilson, *God and philosophy* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2002), pp.52–53; Colin

creation, but God himself, the very embodiment of spirit. One entailment of this claim not stressed by Novalis is that the world is, despite any outward appearances to the contrary, fundamentally perfect and harmonious, and capable of being seen as such. More prominent in his work is the entailment that the world is essentially active and living, rather than an inert realm of matter. As I have described (3.2), for Novalis the poetic self creates its higher self and universe in a way that requires the rest of the world to participate in this creation. The natural world, like human beings, is part of the absolute, combining the physical and the spiritual, representing and revealing the divine, and playing an active role in bringing this spiritual nature to realisation. As a result, we do not merely read the meaning of the world off inert objects and mindless events, but engage with them as in a dialogue, in which these objects and events inform and respond to our actions and interpretations, and in which we have a similar status to these objects and events as living symbols of the divine.

Commentators sometimes describe Novalis' cosmology as panentheistic rather than pantheistic,[123] and I will briefly defend here my use of the latter term, which will also add some nuance to what Novalis means by imagining God as immanent. Novalis explicitly claims that his religion is pantheistic, giving initial justification for using the term,[124] but there is also textual support for using the term "panentheism" to describe his position. In a passage often cited in support of the attribution of panentheism, Novalis seems to be trying to tread a middle ground between pantheism and entheism, that is, between seeing God as wholly one with the world and as wholly outside the world.[125] The former seems to

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E. Gunton, *The promise of Trinitarian theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) p.75; Paul Helm, *The providence of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp.53, 98; Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's theology of the cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), p.50; H. P. Owen, *Concepts of deity* (London: MacMillan, 1971); William C. Placher, *The domestication of transcendence: How modern thinking about God went wrong* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp.128–34, 195–200.

[123] Crowe's conclusions are similar to mine despite his different terminology ("Visible universe", p.139); O'Brien (*Signs of revolution*, pp.251–56) and Zanucchi (*Poesie und Geschichtlichkeit*, pp.366, 376) discuss the question without committing to the term "panentheism."

[124] Novalis, „Allgemeine Brouillon," III p.314 #398. Since the term panentheism was not in use in Novalis' time, however (it was coined in 1828 by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause), this does not alone show that pantheism is the more appropriate term (Harper, *Online etymological dictionary*).

[125] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.442 #73/p.443 #74.

identify the world completely with God, while the latter opposes the two. In the same passage, Novalis states that it is idolatrous to take mediators to be God, but irreligious to have no mediator at all, and that true religion involves understanding mediators as organs of God, or God's sensuous appearance. That is, mediators participate in divinity without being fully God. This is compatible with panentheism, allowing both that the world (and every object or individual within it) is nothing other than God and that God may be greater than and different from the world. It also seems quite compatible with mainstream Christian thought, presenting God as not identical with the world yet permeating it entirely. Novalis maintains the infinity and perfection of the absolute, and establishes a distance between this ideal of perfection and the flawed, finite, transient, opaque reality we encounter. Indeed, his philosophy is founded on the premise that the world as we experience it does not fully embody the divine, and that it is our project to allow it to do so. Thus it is not unreasonable to describe Novalis as a panentheist.

On the other hand, this term obscures some of the radicality of Novalis' position. For Novalis, the relationship of the world to God, the sense in which the world both is divine and does not encapsulate this absolute, is not a relationship of part to whole, nor of a creator to a separate creation, but of an infinite, perfect essence untouched by space and time to a finite, flawed, individualised appearance of the same. Against a materialistic understanding of pantheism, Novalis denies that the world is a collection of empirical, physical objects and events, insisting that its essential nature is spiritual, perfect, and infinite.[126] But describing his writings as panentheistic misses the extent to which he wants to reclaim these latter characteristics for mundane existence. He rejects a picture that places God outside the world, as a transcendent spirituality – even in part. God is greater than the world, but only in the sense that the world is also greater than itself: that is, the world is not merely the way it appears, but potentially more

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[126] Benjamin Crowe makes a similar point: Novalis "rejects equally the monistic naturalism of Spinoza, the remote God of deism, and the irreconcilable dualism between the moral and the real in Kant and Fichte. Instead, he maintains that the ideal order, while never *identical* with the real, pervades the real as a kind of 'bond' or 'harmony' that enables the universe to exist as a coherent whole." Crowe describes the result as "an ambitious synthesis of Spinozistic pantheism and traditional Christianity, which Novalis dubs 'the religion of the visible universe'" ("Visible universe", pp.137, 127).

beautiful, perfect, spiritual, and poetic. Thus Novalis claims, just after the statement quoted in the last paragraph, that "I give myself some licence here, insofar as I do not take pantheism in the usual sense but understand by it the idea that everything can be an organ of the Godhead, a mediator".[127]

Novalis' cosmology re-imagines God and nature, modifying these from their usual forms or picking up less mainstream strains of thought in Christianity. Instead of the transcendent seat of all goodness, rationality, agency, spirituality, and infinitude, God is for Novalis immanent, one with a world and a humanity that shares these attributes, which have a physical form rather than an existence beyond space and time. At the same time, however, Novalis insists that God is not realised fully in the world we encounter, thus complicating his answer to the question of the extent to which the divine is beyond or within mundane existence. Although there is some justification for referring to Novalis' thought as panentheistic, I find that the term "pantheism" better highlights Novalis' aspiration to retrieve the spiritual side of existence for the mundane.

4.3.2 The Fall

Despite undermining a dualistic construal of God and the universe, Novalis claims that human beings and the world as currently constructed are alienated from the divine. This theme is a modification of a basic Christian doctrine. Novalis takes from Christianity the narrative of Fall and salvation, in which union with God is lost and sought. In his translation of the Christian myth, Novalis is concerned to avoid a puritanical streak that would attribute the Fall to the temptations of the flesh, especially if the latter is seen as external to a mind or soul that struggles against these temptations. As I have described (2.3), he insists that the physical is as valuable and integral to human nature and the divine as is the rational or intellectual, resisting an overemphasis on spirituality and reason as the essence of humanity and a denigration of the senses as misleading or leading morally astray. Traditionally, this has been only one strain in Christian thought, running counter to a strain that viewed reason as responsible for the Fall. To an extent, Novalis

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[127] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.442 #73/p.443 #74.

follows this opposite tendency, in which consciousness, reason, and knowledge on the one hand, and individuation on the other, are responsible for the alienation of the human being from the rest of existence, its true self, and, especially, God. In the bible, Adam and Eve originally existed in a state of harmony with each other and nature, and had direct knowledge of God, both of which were lost through their disobedient eating of fruit from the tree of knowledge. Christian thought subsequently often associated individuality, egoism, and consciousness with separation from God.[128] Similarly, for Novalis, an original communion with nature and God was lost as the development and enhancement of consciousness and individuality separated human beings from God, each other, and nature.

However, Novalis also wants to avoid denigrating discursive reason and individuality, and grants these a positive place as essential for realising the divine imperative to become self-conscious. In other words, alienation is valuable in one sense, as necessary to God's purpose and thus to the purpose of existence. Individuation and consciousness are part of the process of the divine coming to know itself, and form an integral part of a valuable process of self-differentiation and self-relation as the divine unfolds itself in the world and human beings.

The concept of God's self-revelation in the world is hardly alien to Christianity, but in addition to the pantheistic twist that Novalis puts on this idea, his account contains two major differences. The first is a difference in moral tone. The Fall is usually presented in terms of sin, indeed the original sin that resulted in the suffering and death that characterise existence.[129] By contrast, although he exhorts his contemporaries to take steps to overcome this alienation, Novalis does not put this in moral terms. On Novalis' version, the Fall – the emergence of individual entities and consciousness – is necessary for the development of the self-consciousness of the absolute, rather than a moral event. As Florian Roder

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[128] Gustav Aulén, *Christus victor: An historical study of the three main types of the idea of the atonement* (London: SPCK, 1961), pp.41–46; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), p.16; G. R. Evans, *Augustine on evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.95.
[129] Genesis 3:14–19.

puts it, "[f]or Novalis the Fall is represented not as individual fault, as moral failure, but as an event that breaks over the whole of humanity, as world-fact."[130]

Novalis does sometimes describe the process of alienation, self-relation, and reconciliation in terms of "morality" and even "evil". However, he subverts these terms to remove their connotations of culpability, guilt, and sin. Novalis defines evil and suffering as functions of separation, collapsing the distinction between human and natural evil: "Everything evil and ill is isolated and isolating – it is the *principle of separation*".[131] Annihilating evil through increasing spiritualisation and unification of the world is the way to realise the good: "I annihilate the ill and evil etc. through *philosophism – raising*".[132] This suggests that the reunification of the world through poetic interpretation is a moral task, but for Novalis this does not entail that earthly existence, with its separations into individual entities, is something in itself evil that we should repudiate, or that action that perpetuates these separations is "evil" in the usual sense. In the same passage Novalis claims that evil is an artificial product of human interpretive activity that can, therefore, be annihilated through poetic interpretation, and in fact that, for the poet, evil already does not exist: "At a certain higher level of consciousness there already exists no evil"; "through connection separation will be sublimated and not sublimated – but evil and ill etc. as *apparent* separation and connection will in fact be sublimated through real separation and unification, which only *emerge reciprocally*".[133] In other words, the onesidedly scientific-rational, atomistic interpretation of existence is the source of "evil", which does not essentially pertain to existence. Even this claim, however, does not ascribe evil, in the sense of sinfulness, to reason. As we have seen, although Novalis claims that an overemphasis on calculative reason is a source of alienation, he does not repudiate it, even explicitly stating that we should be grateful to those who have furthered the development of science, because they enable a higher synthesis of reason with

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[130] Roder, *Die Verwandlung des Menschen*, p.446.
[131] Novalis, „Allgemeine Brouillon," III p.390 #653. For more on Novalis' morality, see 10.6.5.
[132] Novalis, „Allgemeine Brouillon," III p.390 #654.
[133] Novalis, „Allgemeine Brouillon," III p.390 #653. Zanucchi ascribes the lack of sin in Novalis' account to the identification of self and nature which Novalis claims (also in the just-mentioned passage) makes evil only apparent (Zanucchi, *Poesie und Geschichtlichkeit*, pp.394–95).

intuition.[134] Thus Novalis does not take "evil" to have the condemnatory sense that it usually does; it is a negative moment, but one that is necessary for a process leading towards a positive outcome. Evil (as well as pain, ugliness, and disharmony) is a "necessary illusion", which serves to strengthen and develop the good. According to Novalis, "[t]o true religion nothing is *sin*".[135]

The result is that Novalis avoids putting the notion of alienation from God in terms of sin. Instead, he describes the consequences of the approach to the divine in pragmatic, even utilitarian terms, providing a vision of the benefits (knowledge, closer relationships with others, overcoming fear of death, even acquiring magical powers) that await should we begin to construct ourselves poetically, instead of according to one-sidedly discursive reason.

Second, for Novalis the alienation that we experience as conscious individuals is necessary for the self-knowledge of God, and therefore a good in itself, not just as a state that precedes the real value – that is, redemption. As I explained above (2.9.1), for Novalis the self-awareness and self-revelation that drives the absolute to differentiate itself into living beings is not accomplished in death, which makes knowledge impossible, and the ultimate value for existence is not in its final resolution in complete unification with the divine; rather, both life – as a partially alienated, "fallen" state of separation from God – and death – as a fully reconciled, but non-conscious state – are important. More accurately, the ultimate value is the combination of both states, the procession of existence from unification through differentiation and relation back towards unification.

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[134] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III p.520.

[135] Novalis, „Allgemeine Brouillon," III p.417 #769, „Fragmente und Studien," III p.589 #228. Sepasgorian argues that Novalis follows Zinzendorf in focusing, instead of on sin, on the presence of God in the world: Christ, having taken all sins on himself, had wiped out sin (*Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip*, pp.47, 187; see also pp.170–71). On Novalis' notion of morality see Crowe, "Visible universe"; Crowe, "Romanticism and the ethics of style," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91 (2009): 21–41; Krell, *Contagion*; Géza von Molnár, "Die Umwertung des moralischen Freiheitsbegriffs im kunsttheoretischen Denken des Novalis," in *Erkennen und Deuten. Essays zur Literatur und Literaturtheorie. Edgar Lohner in memoriam*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Walter Lohnes (Berlin: 1983); Howard Pollack-Milgate, "Fichte and Novalis on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics," *Philosophy Today* 52:3/4 (2008): 340; Christine Weder, "Moral interest and religious truth: On the relationship between morality and religion in Novalis," *German Life and Letters* 54:4 (2001): 291–309; Zanucchi, *Poesie und Geschichtlichkeit*, p.395. I discuss some implications of this separation of morality from sin in 10.6.5.

Novalis' interpretation of "evil" marks a shift away from more common interpretations of Christian doctrines. Christian tradition has sometimes cast the Fall as a *felix culpa*, that is, as ultimately a good, because it enables God to redeem humanity.[136] However, this does not exonerate individuals from responsibility for their separation from God, or revoke their status as sinners. Nor is the alienated state of humanity presented as itself the condition for knowledge of God, but rather as a turning away from God that entails loss of knowledge of the divine. Thus although Novalis' narrative resonates strongly with Christian accounts of the Fall, one could say that it emphasises the *felix* in *felix culpa* to an extreme, and discards the *culpa*. The turning away from God is performed and required by God for his own self-realisation. Novalis also puts a new slant on the tale itself, as a historical development of consciousness, science, and society rather than a story of desire and disobedience. And he provides new mythical narratives of the story to express this shift in meaning and replace the one in Genesis, for example in his poetic description of the demythologisation of nature and rise of science in *Hymns* that I described above.

4.3.3 Salvation and eternal life

The undermining of the notion of sin is also noticeable in Novalis' translations of the ideas of salvation and eternal life. Novalis' account of these is again a shift in emphasis rather than a complete departure from Christian tradition. He does not see himself as repudiating Christian doctrine, but as adjusting the inadequacies of certain of its expressions and attempting to communicate the deeper truth that its authors intuited and attempted to represent.[137] Within Christianity, the resolution of alienation may be a relatively passive event, in which one can only prepare oneself for God's grace.[138] Here, it is not the activity of human beings, but of

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[136] See Gerald Bray, *The doctrine of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p.90.
[137] Sepasgorian and Zanucchi argue Novalis operates within a Christian framework which he seeks to broaden (*Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip*, p.80; *Poesie und Geschichtlichkeit*, p.336). O'Brien claims instead that Novalis is "irreligious," but I argue against this interpretation (fn 117).
[138] See Aulén, *Christus victor*, pp. 98–112, 134; Philip Walker Butin, *Revelation, redemption, and response: Calvin's Trinitarian understanding of the divine-human relationship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.53; Evans, *Augustine on evil*, p.133; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic theology: An introduction to biblical doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, and Grand Rapids:

God, that reconciles alienated individuals with the divine. Some interpretations of Christianity even maintain that souls are predestined to be saved or damned, emphasising the extent to which this process is outside the individual's control. On the other hand, other strains of Christianity, such as pietism, emphasise good works in bringing about salvation.[139] As we saw above, for Novalis, although the wider world participates actively in moving towards reconciliation, this does not entail that the individual is passive or her fate predetermined, but subverts notions of freedom, autonomy, and activity and passivity to insist on the ability of human beings to construct a more divine, less alienated world – though not alone. It would not be accurate to say that Novalis favours versions of Christianity that grant human beings the power to save themselves over those that stress the need for God's grace; rather, his undermining of dichotomies between transcendent and immanent and active and passive allows him to subvert this difference.

The shift in moral tone is also evident in Novalis' inclusive attitude to salvation. In Christianity salvation is generally only for human beings, who have free will and souls, and not for animals or other parts of nature. This is not so for Novalis, for whom the whole of nature is intrinsically divine, even if human beings have a privileged role as mediators of this divinity. Moreover, it is common for Christian accounts to deny salvation to some human beings, who are permanently destroyed or remain alienated from God after death.[140] Novalis, however, indicates that all human beings (and all nature) will necessarily return to unity with the divine when they die; there is no distinction between sinners and saved in this respect. The distinction between poetic selves and the subjects of

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Zondervan, 1994), pp.320–23; D. Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines* (London: A&C Block, 1977), pp.366–67; Marijn De Kroon, *The honour of God and human salvation*, trans. John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), pp.46–56; von Loewenich, *Luther's theology of the cross*, p.56; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's theology*, ed. and trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p.256; Placher, *Domestication of transcendence*, pp.115–19.

[139] On the former, see Anselm, "Proslogion," in *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (jasper-hopkins.info/proslogion.pdf), chapter 11; Calvin, *Institutes of Christian religion*, pp.31–34; Evans, *Augustine on evil*, pp.117–18, 130–33; Martin Luther, "The freedom of a Christian," trans. W. A. Lambert, in *Three treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp.280–95. On the latter, see Philip Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), *passim*; J. N. Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, p.177.

[140] Alister McGrath, *Christian theology: An introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.436–37.

scientific reason is one of degree: no one is fully integrated with the divine while alive. The benefits that accrue to poetic selves, such as a deeper connection with the rest of existence, a sense of wholeness and fulfilment, control over one's destiny, and the elimination of the fear of death, are direct consequences of learning to view the universe in a new way and live in accordance with this insight, rather than rewards administered on the basis of virtue.[141]

A further difference with some Christian accounts of eternal life is that Novalis does not project the continuation of the person as an individual after death. Sepasgorian has argued that Novalis describes "the continuation of individual personality in transcendence and the personal experience of unending holiness".[142] However, this is inconsistent with Novalis' account of the absolute as undifferentiated and death as final absorption into this undifferentiated unity. As I have stressed, for Novalis, without consciousness, there are no longer divisions between subject and object, and eternal life is subsumption in the infinite. The individual self is annihilated in the complete realisation of the absolute self. Novalis sometimes expresses this transition explicitly in terms of loss of selfhood, though more often as total unification with all things, especially loved ones, and particularly those who have already died and so can be thought of as already experiencing this unification.[143] Novalis' talk of reunification with lost loved ones is thus more plausibly interpreted as a metaphorical description of this final absorption and loss of self than, as Sepasgorian reads it, a prediction of individual resurrection as such.

4.3.4 Human nature

Another theme that Novalis takes up and modifies from a Christian context is the privileged role of human beings as mediators of the divine and the mundane. In the bible human beings are given the role of stewards of the earth, and this notion

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[141] Novalis claims it will be easier to awaken to unity with the absolute after death if we have accustomed ourselves to the idea beforehand, but again, this benefit is both a direct result rather than a reward and a question of degree: it seems everyone will "awaken," or rather, become integrated with the divine after death; the question is only how easy the transition will be (Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II p.418 #18/p.419 #17).

[142] Sepasgorian, *Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip*, p.234.

[143] Novalis, „Hymnen," I pp.131–33 s.1.

continues to inform Christian conceptions of the human vocation.[144] Adam's naming of the animals at God's request lends itself well to interpretation in terms compatible with Novalis' account, suggesting a role for the human being as the interpreter of existence and the one who grants it significance, on behalf of God. In other respects, however, Novalis' model of human beings as mediators modifies this Christian trope. First, Novalis stresses the bilateral nature of mediation, in particular the active role of living physical processes in the realisation by human beings of a more spiritual and unified universe. Human beings mediate spirit to the rest of the world by interpreting that world, and thus creating it as divine, raising the physical world to a higher level of existence. But the world also mediates the divine to the human being, as the place where the spiritual manifests itself in the physical. It is only by learning to speak the language of nature, and so understanding the revelation of God that takes place there, that human beings can construct themselves and their universe as divine in the first place. Furthermore, Novalis states clearly that any object can be a mediator, although human beings are often better suited to this purpose:

> Nothing is more indispensible to true religiosity than a mediator that connects us with the Godhead. Unmediated, the human being can absolutely not stand in relation to the latter. The human being must be thoroughly free in the choice of this mediator. The least compulsion in this harms his religion. [....] One soon sees how relative these choices are, and is implicitly driven to the idea that the essence of religion is really not dependent on the condition of the mediator, but consists simply in the outlook on the latter, in the relationship.[145]

This notion informs Novalis' attitude towards Jesus Christ, providing one of the clearest places where his account modifies Christianity to reveal what he sees as the truth behind its doctrines.[146] Novalis does not distinguish Christ from the rest of the world as different in kind. Although Christ exemplifies the integration

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[144] Genesis 1:26, 2:19–20; see the Vatican International Theological Commission on *Communion and stewardship: Human persons created in the image of God* (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_ communion-stewardship_en.html).

[145] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blütenstaub," II pp.440–42 #73/pp.441–43 #74.

[146] O'Brien takes this to be proof of Novalis' irreligion (*Signs of revolution*, pp.217–18). I have suggested reasons to reject O'Brien's conclusion above (fn 117).

of divine and mundane, Novalis believes all entities can play this role. What is important for Novalis in religion is not the object through which one perceives the divinity of existence, but one's relationship or attitude to that object. In this way Novalis ascribes divinity to the world. While human beings are the clearest and most engaging instance of the presence of spirituality, activity, reason, and consciousness in the world, and have a special role as the place where nature becomes self-conscious, thus providing the articulation of the divine towards which the whole universe unfolds, they differ from the rest of nature in degree, not kind. Human beings and nature are part of the same divine absolute, and are capable of both revealing this absolute and eventually being reunified with it.

4.3.5 Summary of 4.3

Novalis' modifications of Christian accounts tend to move away from dualistic models that stress the value of the transcendent towards monistic, immanent models. God is brought into the world and seen as pervading physical existence, which is correspondingly seen as spiritual, rational, infinite,[147] and inherently good. This union is realised in all of existence rather than in only a single God-man who uniquely embodies both spirit and the world. The experience of the mind and body as distinct and often in conflict is a temporary situation underlain by a more fundamental identity. Other individuals and the natural world are not most fundamentally outside the self, but a deeper part of one's identity. And personal immortality is replaced by overcoming fear of death in realising that one is part of a greater whole, and that one's selfhood is, more essentially than existence as an individual, the selfhood of the absolute. Novalis' model thus provides a new synthesis and modification of Christian themes. His account is a way of telling the Christian story that attempts to access the ideas it communicates independently and make them stimulating for new and old audiences alike.

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[147] That is, potentially infinite without ever actually realising this infinity: the poetic task is to present the world in such a way that the infinite is represented in the finite but, as we have seen, this is never fully accomplished ("Logologische Fragmente [II]," II p.545 #105).

4.4 Reason, religion, and communal myth

In working on a previous interpretation of existence in the form of existing Christian doctrines and narratives, Novalis believes he is creating a higher poetic manifestation of the world than if he were to begin from scratch, so that his interpretation will be invested not only with the truth as manifested by the physical world and his own spiritual activity in engaging with that manifestation, but also with the spirit of those interpreters whose accounts his model translates. In addition, by working on a tradition that, in its multifaceted and many-streamed forms, already informed the lives and worldviews of many hundreds of thousands of people, Novalis joins in a dialogue with an existing Christian community. In doing so, he calls this community to together re-engage with the ideas expressed in Christian teachings and European culture,[148] inviting a personal appropriation of social, moral, religious, and intellectual mores through insight into the original intuitions that underlay their establishment. Thus the new myths he provides are contributions and invitations to a communal construction of self, world and society along the lines he describes.

Novalis' new myths are designed to engage not only Christians, but also adherents of an Enlightenment scientific outlook who may or may not be Christian. Novalis' translation of Christian myth puts the story of the Fall in terms of the rise of reason and science, and salvation as a synthesis of these with the affective side of human life. Novalis' myth is an imaginative account of historical developments that describe, in poetic terms, the emergence of the scientifically rational perspective that was coming to predominate in his time. As such, it could appeal to those unhappy with literal or traditional interpretations of Christian doctrine, or with the idea of reliance on faith or intuition, but who recognised the poverty of a life that emphasises conscious experience and rationality to the exclusion of other aspects. It could also appeal to those who placed a high value on the achievements of modernity and science, since the project of developing a poetic self stresses the value of sophisticated, articulated knowledge and rationality. Novalis' narrative acknowledges the progress made by human

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[148] Novalis, „Christenheit oder Europa," III pp.523–24.

knowledge and civilisation which, he claims, must be integrated with the intuitions of unity and the aesthetic sense for nature that mark other important elements of human experience.

Novalis embodied this synthesis of highly-valued scientific and pragmatic knowledge with artistic, even mystical, feeling, reading profound religious significance into the rocks and minerals with which he worked as a salt mine inspector and surveyor. He regards miners as having mystical knowledge,[149] and presents tradespeople, musicians, rulers, shepherds, monks, and people from all walks of life as grasping and articulating insights into the universe, and having a deep aesthetic sense and a feeling for nature. In *The Novices of Saïs* and *Henry of Ofterdingen*, wisdom about the nature of existence is expressed in conversations among the diverse characters, who contribute different points that complement each other, even where they disagree, to build up a picture of the subject-matter.

In other words, Novalis demands the integration of many perspectives on experience in the shaping of new myths. The condition for overcoming alienation is not dogmatic adherence to a particular mythical construction, nor individual perception of the truth, but imaginative engagement with the world, including the world as it appears through the ideas of others, in order to create new, communal myths. This creative engagement should work with as many faculties as possible, including the intellect and the emotions, involve listening to others, recognise the fallibility of any particular constructions of experience, and remain open to revision. Thus the new myths Novalis provides are not new dogmas, in the sense either that they are supposed to be permanent and universally accepted, or that they must be accepted on faith alone; instead, they need to be appropriated by their audience, with whatever modifications are demanded by the personal experiences of this audience. Thus Novalis' translation of Christian doctrine shifts the emphasis of religion from the content of its myths to the attitudes and processes that he thinks are needed to develop this content. As I showed in the last chapter, these are openness and creative engagement with experiences, requiring cooperative interpretation of the self and its world in dialogue with others.

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[149] Novalis, „Heinrich," III pp.253–66, esp. p.260.

Chapter 5 Affirmation and immanence I

5.1 Introduction

I have argued that a major concern in Novalis' work is to find possibilities for affirming life in an age in which the meaning of life and the role of human beings is not obvious, and that in response to this need Novalis advocates a communal creation of new myths that overcome the dichotomies of a prevailing and alienating worldview. This chapter argues that, although falling short of creating an immanent affirmation of life, Novalis takes steps towards providing such an affirmation. As I indicated in the introduction to this thesis, an immanent account of existence should deny that there exists anything outside the world we can experience. This would include a God conceived as beyond the world, or a thing in itself separate from and inaccessible to appearances. Since we are looking for a way to affirm existence, human beings and their world must be granted value, but not a value imported from elsewhere; it must be intrinsic to them. Finally, an immanent account needs to explain our experience of being situated within, and so both influenced by and acting upon, an environment that is both amenable to our thoughts and actions in some respects and resistant to them in others.

In section 5.2 I consider the ways in which Novalis' account fulfills or suggests a way of fulfilling these criteria, and the ways in which it falls short of a completely immanent affirmation. In 5.3 I argue that Novalis' affirmation of existence does not, and does not claim to, function by completely overcoming alienation, but by mitigating it and providing conditions for valuing it. Novalis provides a means of adjusting one's attitude towards the alienated situation of human beings that allows the individual to affirm and endorse existence without denying that as she experiences it it is divided, painful, and in many ways opaque.

5.2 Immanence

5.2.1 Immanent aspects of Novalis' model

Novalis' pantheism has God, including his infinity, rationality, spirituality, and goodness, as present in the world and taking physical form. Rather than a

transcendent God who creates the world as a subordinate realm of beings, for Novalis God is that world itself. This reflects Novalis' intention to return value to aspects of life that have often been denigrated, maintaining that rather than lacking highly-valued characteristics such as rationality, activity, spirit and freedom, the mundane is essentially already these things, to such an extent that it is actually divine. In other words, against conceptions of life, especially its physical aspects, as either having extrinsic value as a means to something else or as inherently wicked and needing to be discarded or escaped, Novalis calls for the recognition of intrinsic value to the world. That is, he presents the world as embodying characteristics that we already value. The salvation of existence is not a question of casting off or rejecting certain parts of it, and is not imported from outside, as forgiveness or grace. Instead, Novalis views salvation as the realisation of an inner nature that, properly conceived, already permeates everything. This realisation occurs through a process of interpretation and development that takes place within the physical world, not beyond it.

Novalis also maintains that the world is in principle accessible to human beings, although as we have seen a complete understanding of the universe is a regulative ideal rather than an achievable reality. Insofar as we encounter our own nature and the rest of the world through representations, we experience these things as separated; however, through intuition, imagination, and creative interpretation we can overcome these separations and glimpse the nature of reality. Furthermore, because of the continuity between conscious life and the unconscious due to their shared divine nature, this does not entail abandoning conscious representation, but rather partly integrating intuition and discursive thought. And because, despite the overt distance between ourselves and the objects of knowledge that results from their appearance as representations, we are at root united, the representations we create can express the true nature of things.

This shows how Novalis attempts to situate the human being within the world, as both a part of it and a special place where it becomes self-aware. Although they have special significance because of their ability to be conscious of their world and so render it in a higher form, human beings are part of that world.

Like other things in that world, they form symbols that constitute a universal language, and can read themselves in the same way that they read the rest of nature. When they are attentive to the meaning of that language in the right way, they express a world that takes a new form in and through them. The world is like a conversation that understands itself, with human beings not external auditors of the conversation – for example as minds that observe the physical world from a transcendent perspective – but the place within the world where this understanding is most sophisticated, intellectual, and self-aware.

Finally, as I have argued, Novalis identifies the root of modern alienation as dualistic thinking and the categories employed by reason. These are manifested in the world – including ourselves – that results from our interpretations according to these categories. Novalis attempts to undermine this dualistic interpretation, that is, the interpretation according to dichotomies of subject and object, mind and world, active and passive, life and death, and spiritual and physical. In most cases, his account reduces, rather than eliminates, the distance that this interpretation places between these terms, although, as I argued above (3.2), he subverts in a more thoroughgoing sense the dichotomy between activity and passivity. For Novalis, conscious experience is continuous with the unconscious, both within and beyond the individual, and these can gradually be integrated, although a gap will always remain with respect to the extent to which they reflect each other. The same is true of the subject and the object, which we necessarily encounter as separate, but which beneath this separation are really one, meaning that we can reduce the separation between them over time. Life and death, for Novalis, are not opposites, with death annulling life and cancelling out its goals and meaning; rather, they are parts of the same process. Death continues the process of unification that is the goal of life, and the greater the extent to which we engage with this goal, the less stark will be the transition from one to the other.

5.2.2 Transcendent aspects of Novalis' model

Overcoming the above dichotomies is for Novalis a regulative ideal, rather than something that can actually be accomplished, other than in the annihilation of the

self. In effect, Novalis preserves a two-level model of existence, in which at one superficial, alienating level, things are experienced according to the dichotomies that I have described, while underneath, at a more essential and authentic level, we can also experience a monistic way of being in which we are completely one. Novalis' analysis of this two-level model is sophisticated, identifying the limitations of the former interpretation while recognising its reality within experience, acknowledging that it has value while pointing out some damaging consequences of espousing it too wholeheartedly, and insisting on the importance of finding a way to think outside it.

The division between two levels of reality in Novalis' cosmology reflects the post-Kantian idealist separation of the everyday or empirical I from the absolute I, often identified with God, whose relation to each other was at issue for Fichte and Schelling, among others.[150] Novalis' response to this problem is to claim that we have access to both kinds of existence, although imperfectly, and can combine them, although never completely. His account leaves a role for the transcendent, as an absolute self with which the empirical self, or the individual, cannot fully identify. However, in maintaining that the individual can begin to identify with this absolute self while alive, partially realising it within time and space, he suggests the need for and possibility of an immanent interpretation of attributes that have traditionally been associated with a transcendent divinity. The disagreement over whether to describe Novalis' religion as pantheist or panentheist, which I discussed in 4.3.1, reveals the complexity of this resolution, as striving to reject both the alienating effects of dualism and the reductionist implications of some forms of monism.

It might be argued that Novalis' attempt to overcome the damaging effects of dualism is not explicit or thoroughgoing enough. Although Novalis insists that the material world is essentially spiritual, he also argues that it currently exists, because interpreted and created by human beings in that way, as separate from the spiritual. Retaining elements of dualism in this way could be problematic for

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[150] Fichte, "[First] introduction"; Fichte, *System of ethics*; Schelling, *System of transcendental idealism*; Fackenheim, *The God within*; Di Giovanni, "Atheism dispute"; Seidel, *Activity and Ground*; Klemm and Zöller, *Figuring the self*; Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*.

claiming an intrinsic value to the world. On Novalis' model, human beings act as mediators importing spirit to the world. The result recalls perhaps too strongly a model of salvation as bringing an external spirituality into a materiality that, while potentially spiritual, is currently devoid of spirit. Novalis tries to cast this in terms of the realisation of an inner spirituality, but this retains an implication of the inferiority of matter on its own, without the activity of human beings. Physicality, affects, and the unconscious seem to be valuable not in themselves, but because they are in fact spiritual and amenable to being made conscious, or repeated at a "higher" level. Thus, while to a certain extent Novalis undermines the denigration of the physical, emotional, unconscious, and mundane aspects of existence, he retains a largely alien value for these in terms of their status as actually intellectual, rational, capable of consciousness, and divine, and as revealing these. To this extent, he does not provide an immanent affirmation. Furthermore, the impossibility of ever completely spiritualising the mundane entails that the latter always remains inadequate in fact. Novalis' call to integrate unconscious and non-rational characteristics of existence partially undermines the denigration of the human being and nature that attend a dualistic model, because it suggests that these characteristics are amenable to salvation, but it does not grant these an inherent value independently of their sublimation into more spiritual forms.

5.2.3 Novalis' account as a precursor of immanent affirmation
Alongside this eschatological story, which seems to relegate earthly life to mere preparation for genuine fulfillment and to construe the human vocation as working towards a goal that transcends possible experience, Novalis' account contains elements that prepare for a valorisation of existence on an immanent basis. His undermining of the active-passive distinction suggests the possibility of a more thoroughgoing subversion of dualism than his account provides. And the importance for self-identity that he grants interaction with others implies the possibility of a communal construction of meaning and value that could provide a strong foundation for a new sense of identity and purpose and undermine alienation without relying on pantheism.

Novalis' subversion of the dichotomy between passive and active has important implications for his answer to alienation. He does not just claim that apparently passive things are in fact active, but, in his account of poetic interpretation, allows no real distinction between activity and passivity. Poetic "activity" is in fact neither active, in the sense of being unconstrained, autonomous, and independent, nor passive, in the sense of being constrained, heteronomously determined, and dependent. Rather, poetic activity involves the mutual agency of poet and subject-matter, or of speaker and listener. Because of the role of interpretation in shaping the universe and the self, this means that the self-construction of the individual and its world is carried out in communion with others, whether those others are other human beings or nature as a whole. This does not yet undermine the categories of calculative reason, but invokes the possibility of a conception of existence that situates the mind firmly within its world, the self as thoroughly engaged with and situated in the context of the object, and consciousness as emerging from and continuous with the unconscious.

For Novalis, the "others" involved in the individual's activity are in fact aspects of the same deeper self of which she is a part. Nevertheless, as far as the experience of the individual is concerned, this does not matter. As she experiences it, the meaning of the universe, her vocation, and even her identity, are created through interaction with others. This suggests the possibility of a dynamic self-construction and encounter with experience that recognises the dependence of one's identity and actions on the possibilities given to one by others, without a transcendent basis. Furthermore, the importance for self-identity that Novalis grants interaction with others promotes an affirming stance towards existence. Novalis views the individual as fundamentally connected with its community and its environment and as ideally integrating these in its self-identity. It does so through dialogue with the other, which allows it to identify with elements of experience formerly construed as outside itself. Novalis' vision of the human being is of a developing, organic, self-creating self that, with others, forms all aspects of its nature and experiences into a single, meaningful whole.[151] By doing

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[151] Novalis, „Anekdoten," p.580 #242.

so, the poetic self overcomes the isolation and loss of purpose that attends an overemphasis on individuality, particularly on individual consciousness.

Although Novalis' account is based on divinity as the goal towards which these efforts are directed, his work points towards a means of achieving such fulfillment even without an ultimate divine significance to the world or a real unified essence underlying self and other. The relevant factor is the understanding of the self as having a project, with its community, of overcoming divisions and distances between entities and between the world and the self (see 10.5). Novalis calls for the translation of experience into a myth that emphasises the connections between things, and it is this that allows us to see beyond individual consciousness and be released from the fear of death. We are to understand ourselves as having a vocation to work towards a more complete understanding of the other, bringing ourselves closer together and by doing so building a world that better reflects us.[152] Whether or not there is a divine absolute that unifies everything, the poetic self can in this way overcome the loss of meaning and direction that Novalis believes affected his contemporaries. His work allows the affirmation of existence and escape from the fear of death by showing how we can achieve fulfillment by overstepping the boundaries of individuality through communion with others.[153]

5.3 Novalis' response to alienation as incomplete

Regardless of this insight into the affirming, creative potential of community, which I discuss in more detail in part 3, Novalis' account as it stands is not a complete response to alienation. The result seems to be a divided self, seeking unity but currently fragmented, in one sense existing in communion with others, nature, and God, but separated from this deeper level of communion by its

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[152] Mary Strand also points out that for Novalis poetry unites human beings without removing their differences, breaking down boundaries between self and other. Strand claims that, as a result, for Novalis "[c]onsciousness as the center of the subject is not fixed or stable, but rather a fluid series of images of otherness" and "[c]ommunication, for Novalis, involves the expression and transformation of both self and other" (Strand, *I/You*, pp.16, 55). On the reciprocal interaction of self and other in Novalis, see also Kuzniar, "Hearing women's voices"; Kneller, "Romantic conceptions of the self"; Crowe, "Ethics of style".

[153] "We are eternal because we love each other" (Henry to Mathilde, Novalis, „Heinrich," I p.288).

consciousness and individuality. Although Novalis attempts to provide a model that integrates the fragmented aspects of existence in order to preclude alienation from any of them, in the end he seems to present discursive reason and consciousness as necessarily alienating features, and therefore to encourage distancing oneself from these in the approach towards a non-alienated self. Is Novalis' poetic self unable to endorse its individual existence fully, remaining in a state of self-alienation? Does reason appear as a villain, as a part of oneself that one must repudiate as separating from others, God, and one's true nature?

I hope that the latter objection has been adequately answered, insofar as I have shown that according to Novalis reason and discursive consciousness, as well as intuition, are necessary to a poetic representation of reality. The first objection, however, reveals something important about Novalis' response to alienation. On Novalis' account, the individual is always alienated from itself, but it is only through this alienation that the divine purpose of the universe can be realised. Rather than saving humanity from alienation, Novalis shows how to affirm life despite, indeed even partly because of, this alienation. Thus his account primarily alleviates the affects of horror and confusion that characterize the alienation associated with the modern situation, reconstituting separation from self, others, and God as both inessential to human existence and a valuable site of self-realization.

Novalis' solution does also allow alienation to be mitigated, moving the universe towards a reconciled unity and reducing the sensation of alienation experienced due to this division. Separation from others is no longer insurmountable or permanent, but a temporary condition; and, furthermore, one that enables the expression of creative freedom. The promise of eventual integration with others, God, and nature allows these to be understood, if not completely then at least partially, as part of the self, forming the foundation for an expectation of rapport and sympathy with others. Furthermore, understanding the world in the way that Novalis suggests and working to realise that world through poetic interpretation encourages an affirming and endorsing attitude towards one's own acts and character, as having meaning and direction. This also provides

impetus and justification for efforts to improve the world, as we seek to create it as a more explicit embodiment of its intrinsic value as divine, spiritual, self-aware, and interconnected. Nonetheless, what Novalis provides is not a total solution to alienation, but a way of reducing its extent and, particularly, its negative consequences for our ability to accept and endorse ourselves.

5.4 Conclusion

Novalis' affirmation of existence allows us to make sense of the world, our identity, and our role in life, and suggests the possibility of doing so without recourse to a transcendent God or dualistic, divisive categories for representing experience. However, this affirmation is not completely immanent, nor does it remove alienation entirely. We are left with a sense of distance from aspects of ourselves that we and our world do not yet embody fully and never can: the world and we are always inadequate to the goal of complete integration and awareness. This results in the sense of longing expressed by Novalis' poetry, which reveals the sorrow and pain of existence as transient and divided beings, and which remains even on his life- (and death-)affirming account:

> Unending and mysterious
> Sweet shivers flow through us –
> It seems to me there sounds from deep distances
> An echo of our sorrow.
> Our loved ones are also longing for us,
> And sent us this longing breath.[154]

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[154] Novalis, „Hymnen," I p.156 s.6. In chapter 10 (10.5.3) I show how, for Novalis, this longing is productive, insofar as it spurs to continued attempts to engage with the other and with the absolute.

Part 2 Nietzsche's philosophy of affirmation: Scepticism and the individual

Nietzsche's overt anti-Christianity and rejection of ideals seems to put a wide gulf between his work and that of Novalis. I argue, however, that these differences, as well as Nietzsche's more substantial shift towards immanence, should be seen in the context of what are at root similar projects. Like Novalis, Nietzsche responds to a modern condition of alienation by aiming to provide a philosophy of affirmation that moves away from a supposedly objective cosmology and reliance on the transcendent. The goals of affirming life, and on an immanent basis, are quite overt in Nietzsche's case, unlike in Novalis'. Part 2 of this thesis gives an exposition of Nietzsche's engagement with the problem of death and suffering, his critiques of reason and religion, his attitude towards the self and its community, and his demand for new myths as creative solutions to alienation. In chapter 6 I explain the immanent nature of the affirmation that Nietzsche advocates. In chapter 7 I describe Nietzsche's approach to society and the individual, and explain why he maintains that existence must be affirmed on an individual, rather than social, basis. In chapter 8 I present Nietzsche's proposed response to alienation as the construction of myth, and investigate the ways in which this helps cope with alienation. Chapter 9 investigates the extent to which Nietzsche's response to alienation successfully repudiates the transcendent, summarising some criticisms that have been made of his attempt and identifying the strengths of his account. In part 3 I will argue that these strengths should be incorporated in a contemporary attempt to cope with alienation.

Chapter 6 Death II: Suffering and joy

6.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the later Nietzsche's attempts to provide an immanent affirmation of existence. Nietzsche moves from an early model, in which coping with suffering and death requires transfiguring an encounter with a terrible reality into something beautiful and manageable, to a later model in which suffering and death are endorsed for themselves, without recourse to a metaphysical consolation or beautiful veils that hide their necessity or value. This represents a shift from a two-world model, in which a thing in itself is construed as underneath or behind appearances, to an immanent model, in which there is no extra-experiential reality, but only changes in the configuration of experiences themselves. Nietzsche aims to promote the endorsement of death, suffering, transience and pain without recourse to anything beyond the experiences of the individual.

6.2 Alienation

Nietzsche's diagnosis of modern alienation, or European nihilism, needs no introduction. I include here just one famous passage that expresses the disorientation and sense of loss that Nietzsche thinks attends the destruction of a worldview that situates human beings in relation to the transcendent:

> "Whither is God?" [the madman] cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him –* you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?["]¹⁵⁵

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[155] GS s.125, KSA III pp.480–81. I give standard English abbreviations for Nietzsche's works, followed by references to the *Kritische Studienausgabe*. For English quotations, unless stated otherwise I use modified translations from the following sources: "The anti-christ," in *Twilight of the idols / The anti-christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1968); *Beyond good and evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973, 1990); "The birth of tragedy," in *The birth of tragedy and The case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); "The case of Wagner," in *The birth of tragedy and The case of Wagner*; "Ecce homo," trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *On the genealogy of morals / Ecce homo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989);

Nietzsche believes that human beings are in the process of realising their alienation from a traditional social system, cosmology, religion, and morality and, furthermore, that through the struggle to cope with this loss they are discovering that this older way of life has itself been responsible for a deeper alienation of the human being from itself. In western Europe, with its Christian heritage, human beings had tended to understand themselves in terms of their relations to a being (an all-powerful, saving and justifying creator God) and a state (eternal life) that transcended physical existence and actual experience. In the past, Nietzsche claims, these constructions were used to make sense of the latter, which is to all appearances uncaring, unjust, destructive, tragic, and full of suffering.[156] Without such constructions, we find ourselves stranded in just such a terrifyingly arbitrary and uncontrollable world, with apparently no way to make sense of it or make it bearable. Human existence is revealed in its finitude, transience, incomprehensibility, pain, futility, and ultimate lack of justification.

According to Nietzsche, the notion that these characteristics are problematic is itself a construction of a particular worldview,[157] and this constitutes a more fundamentally alienating outlook that he addresses. To overcome this alienation, human beings must embrace their status as the original creators of their worldviews. The collapse of traditional ways of making sense of the universe provides the opportunity to do this. These systems can now be replaced by new ways of determining action and endorsing life that ground delight in existence on ourselves rather than on a source taken to be external to us.

For Nietzsche, this turn towards a self-creation of values is not new, but resurrects an ability – in fact, a need – to create and affirm that we have always

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The gay science, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); "On the genealogy of morals," trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, in *On the genealogy of morals / Ecce homo*; "Nietzsche contra Wagner," *The Project Gutenberg e-book of The case of Wagner, Nietzsche contra Wagner, and selected aphorisms* (www.gutenberg.org/files/25012/25012-h/25012-h.html); *Thus spoke Zarathustra: A book for everyone and no one*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961); "On the truth and lies in a nonmoral sense," in *Philosophy and truth: Selections from Nietzsche's notebooks of the early 1870's* [sic], ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990); "Twilight of the idols," in *Twilight of the idols / The anti-christ*.

[156] GM III.11, KSA V pp.361–63, GM III.15, KSA V pp.372–75.

[157] GM III.15, KSA V pp.372–75, GM III.28, KSA V pp.411–12.

had. This need has been masked, stifled, and sublimated in the religious and epistemological systems that have recently become unsustainable. The latter, he claims, have taken "from you and from me what is common to us – the monstrous and boundless declaration of yes and amen".[158] Human beings have a power that Nietzsche describes as "monstrous": a limitless ability to affirm that has been concealed by reliance on seemingly external justifications for life and explanations of who we are and how we should act. Although once effective as means of structuring and endorsing existence, these justifications are not only ultimately empty, but also deny human beings their strength and power, upon which authentic joy in existence can be based.

In light of the loss of grounding provided by earlier moral systems, Nietzsche advocates liberating the destructive-creative powers within the human being in order to shape new ways of living. The alternatives are, he thinks, on the one hand to find substitutes for the old Christian religion, such as socialism, science, progress or democracy, that claim to give objective grounds for understanding the world and judging behaviour, and that allow the illusion to be maintained that the world is rational and just or can be made that way; or, on the other hand, to succumb to misery and madness. The former is a denial of the fact that without its religious underpinnings, the contemporary system of values falls apart,[159] and merely postpones the inevitable realisation of the emptiness and alienation that underlie it. The latter represents the final undermining of life, of the real world of human experience, at the hands of a fantasy.

6.3 Affirmation in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Nietzsche was concerned with this problem in various forms throughout his career, and described solutions that rested on the human capacity to affirm by creating art and myth. His later attempt at an immanent philosophy departs from a more traditionally metaphysical, dualistic account of affirmation in his early work. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche presents the affirmation of a terrible

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[158] Z III Before sunrise, KSA IV p.208.
[159] TI Expeditions s.5, KSA VI p.114.

reality as a glimpse into the "Dionysian" abyss of the horror, chaos, and flux of existence, and concomitant construction of beautiful, controlled "Apollonian" illusions of individual entities and relative permanence that sublimate the former into a form that we can manage and endorse: "the truly existing and original oneness, as the eternally suffering and contradictory, equally needs the enchanting vision, the pleasurable appearance, for its continual salvation".[160]

According to Nietzsche, usually a disruption of this Apollonian realm, such as in intoxication, breaks down the boundaries between self and other, dissolving the individual into a delirious experience as part of a "primal Oneness". This dissolution involves "a complete forgetting of the self" and is incompatible with individual and conscious life.[161] Conscious contemplation of this underlying reality would be paralysing: the primal unity is chaotic, painful, and destructive of particular entities, and insight into that unity involves recognising one's transience, pain, and powerlessness.[162] Thus, to live, human beings need to cast a veil over reality, transfiguring their visions of the chaos and destructiveness of the world into illusions of beauty, structure, order, rationality, and calculability, which allow them to make judgments and decisions and to act.

For Nietzsche, this is the source of the beauty of Greek culture and art: the need for beauty and the ability to produce it are proportionate to the tendency to death and despair that a person or people embodies as a result of their experience of existence as a terrible, all-engulfing, and indifferent process of production and destruction.[163] Existence compels us to live insofar as we encounter it as something beautiful, and for this reason we need art and illusion: "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* are existence and the world eternally *justified*".[164]

The fullest expression of this transfiguring process, the early Nietzsche claims, is in tragedy, which gives insight into the nature of existence as fate,

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[160] BT s.4, KSA I p.38; see also BT s.7, KSA I pp.52–57.

[161] The dissolution of boundaries occurs both between human beings and between these and nature (BT s.1, KSA I p.29). Cf Novalis' conception of the fundamental unity of all things.

[162] BT s.7, KSA I pp.52–57. This does not mean that the individual entity is immediately destroyed, but that one's everyday experience as an individual is replaced temporarily by an experience of unity and chaos, which would be unsustainable for long periods without making it impossible for the individual to function and survive.

[163] BT s.25, KSA I p.156.

[164] BT s.5, KSA I p.47.

conflict and suffering that would otherwise destroy the individual. The union of the Apollonian and Dionysian in tragedy makes the inevitable suffering, conflict, and meaninglessness of existence perceptible to the audience in a form that does not destroy the individual, and that they can enjoy and desire.[165] Music grants immediate access to the primal unity, while the image of the downfall of the hero reveals, in mythical form, these destructive forces of the universe overcoming the individual, which is the fundamental process of life. In observing the hero engulfed by fate, the audience members, without being annihilated as individuals, feel themselves joined with life itself, able to recognise and endorse the massive creative-destructive power of which they, like the hero, are a part:

> Only from the spirit of music can we understand delight in the destruction of the individual. For only in single instances of such destruction can we clearly see the eternal phenomenon of Dionysiac art, which expresses the will in its omnipotence, behind the *principium individuationis*, the eternal life that lies beyond the phenomenal world, regardless of all destruction. Metaphysical delight in the tragic is a translation of the image: the hero, the supreme manifestation of the will, is negated to our gratification, because he is only a phenomenon, and the eternal life of the will is left untouched by his destruction. [….] In Dionysiac art and its tragic symbolism, […] nature addresses us with its true, undisguised voice: "Be like me! The Primal Mother, eternally creative, eternally impelling into life, eternally drawing satisfaction from the ceaseless flux of phenomena!"
>   [….] A metaphysical consolation wrests us momentarily from the bustle of changing forms. For a brief moment we really become the primal essence itself, and feel its unbounded lust for existence and delight in existence. Now we see the struggles, the torment, the destruction of phenomena as necessary, given the constant proliferation of forms of existence forcing and pushing their way into life, the exuberant fertility of the world will. [....] For all our pity and terror, we are happy to be alive, not as individuals but as *the* single living thing, merged with its creative joy.[166]

Tragedy uses mythical, Apollonian figuration within the realm of individuated appearances to structure as joyful and desirable the undifferentiated, dynamic real

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[165] "The tragic myth and the tragic hero are interposed between our highest musical stimulation and the music. They are, at bottom, only a symbol of the most universal facts, of which only music can speak directly [....] *Apolline* power, aimed at the reconstitution of the almost fragmented individual, emerges with the healing balm of a blissful deception [….] And where before we breathlessly felt on the verge of extinction in the convulsive paroxysm of all our feelings, connected to this existence by a mere thread, we now see and hear only the hero, mortally wounded and yet undying" (BT s.21, KSA I p.136; see also BT s.7, KSA I pp.52–57).
[166] BT ss.16–17, KSA I pp.108–9; see also BT s.24, KSA I pp.149–54.

world behind these appearances. Rather than denying, avoiding, minimising or justifying suffering, chaos, and destruction, tragedy glorifies these as the driving forces of life, surging through human beings as through all living things, uniting them in one terrible creative-destructive process. This is the nature of life, and an affirming, non-alienated stance needs to endorse precisely this, not construct a cosmodicy that denies the painful nature of existence.

6.4 The later Nietzsche's model for affirming a terrible existence

The affirmation of life promoted by the later Nietzsche retains this emphasis on apprehending the terrible and destructive nature of existence, but differs from his account of the Greeks in (at least) three important respects. First, he rejects the two-world model of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which insight into a terrible reality behind appearances is coupled with the reassuringly comprehensible, pleasing forms of the apparent realm of individuated phenomena. Second, he maintains that existence must be affirmed by individuals as such, that is, by and for themselves, not as participants in a communal affirmation. Third, he shifts the means of affirming life from discovering a model or an explanation that justifies existence to the process of justifying or endorsing existence itself. In chapter 8 I look at the latter change, describing it as a process of myth-creating, and in chapter 7 I analyse Nietzsche's shift to an individualistic model. In this chapter, I describe the turn towards immanence performed by the later Nietzsche, explaining how he thinks life can be affirmed without recourse to a realm behind appearances that justifies the inevitability of suffering and annihilation.

6.4.1 Interpretation and affirmation

Although some of Nietzsche's concerns carry over from *The Birth of Tragedy*, in his later work affirmation is not achieved through insight into reality, as one glimpses, through a veil of individuated entities and relative permanence, a terrible, chaotic essence that one affirms. In fact, for the later Nietzsche affirmation involves stripping away illusions that make experiences seem gentler,

pleasanter, and more orderly or rational than they are.[167] Chief among the delusions that lead to such constructions is, Nietzsche claims, the subject metaphysics that he maintains lies behind Christianity, language, consciousness, and, in exaggerated form, the prevailing modern worldview. Nietzsche maintains that no substances or essences underlie the processes, forces, and appearances that comprise events, despite the fact that the usual ways of talking about and understanding them rely on these ideas. Rather, these are interpretations of experience, with no necessary relation to a way things really are.[168] The same is true in general of the prevailing view of the world in terms of separate atomistic entities and their relations, subject and object, freedom and causality, and a mind separate from yet somehow present in the world.

These interpretations make life manageable, enabling judgment and action. In particular, they allow the domination of one's environment, expansion of one's influence, and survival. Nietzsche claims, for example, that "The right of lords to give names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power by the rulers: they say 'this *is* this and this,' they seal every thing and event with a sound and therewith, as it were, take possession of it."[169] Indeed, it is not possible to encounter anything unless through an interpretation; there is no such thing as immediate access to a reality other than experiences. Nietzsche maintains that not only conscious, discursively articulated accounts of the nature of the world are interpretations, but also any experience we have, including basic sensory and perceptual experience.[170]

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[167] TI Reason s.6, Myth, KSA VI pp.78–79, 80–81; EH Preface s.2, KSA VI pp.257–58.

[168] BGE ss.3, 12, 14, KSA V pp.17, 26–27, 28; GM I.3, I.13, KSA V pp.260–61, 280; NCW Objections, KSA VI pp.418–20; TI Errors s.5, KSA VI p.93.

[169] GM I.2, KSA V p.260.

[170] BGE s.12, KSA V pp.26–27. In general, interpretations allow human beings to negotiate their surroundings by imposing structure and meaning, enabling expansion of power and influence as well as a sensation of this increase in power. However, Nietzsche suggests that interpretations that allow the greatest mastery of the environment are not necessarily those that allow the greatest *feeling* of power and self-affirmation. A weak, social worldview may promote propagation and survival better than an independent worldview, whose creators tend to die out (BGE s.262, KSA V pp.216–17; GM I.17, KSA V pp.288–89). Affirming oneself is not necessarily the same as promoting one's survival. While Nietzsche often places these together, for example in the development of consciousness and language (see 7.2.1), he also argues that the drive to overcome resistances within and outside the self is, at least in great individuals, stronger than the drive to survive, while the urge merely to survive leads to a weak, uninspiring brand of human being (GM

For Nietzsche, believing that such interpretations present objective pictures of a given universe is a mistake that is made often and that has serious negative consequences. Nietzsche's account of these consequences is well-known, and I will only briefly list some of them here: First, the richness and diversity of human possibility is precluded by any interpretation that claims to be objective and so demands universal assent; and by the same means, creativity, which Nietzsche thinks is fundamental to the ability to affirm, is stifled.[171] Belief in the particular metaphysics of Christianity and modern European thought has a particularly damaging outcome: the basis of this system on the subject, as an agent behind actions, encourages evaluating these actions on moral terms, demanding they be changed, and measuring them against an imaginary external moral standard, with the result that actual experiences are warped and devalued. Similarly, belief in a "real" world behind appearances – whether a heavenly realm or things in themselves – means mental representations and perceptions are judged inadequate. In other words, where a transcendent realm is given the highest value, the world of experience is by contrast denigrated.[172]

6.4.2 Immanence: Affirmation without a real world

For the later Nietzsche, anything beyond the surface of experience is a fantasy and can only grant significance to the surface at the expense of its intrinsic value.[173] He therefore denies not only the existence of God as a basis for the justification of existence, and of the self as a subject standing behind actions and experiences, but also the existence of a thing in itself, or a real world.[174] In order to live, we need

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I.17, KSA V pp.288–89; BGE s.262, KSA V pp.214–17). This disconnect appears in Nietzsche's characterisations of what it is to affirm life, for example: "[W]hat does joy not want! it is thirstier, warmer, hungrier, more fearful, more secret than all woe, it wants *itself* [.... S]o rich is joy that it thirsts for woe, for Hell, for hatred, for shame, for the lame, for the *world*, because this world, oh it knows it! [....] All eternal joy longs for the ill-constituted. For all joy wants itself, therefore it also wants heart's agony!" (Z IV Intoxicated song s.11, KSA IV p.403). Affirmation involves willing everything, whether joyful or painful, including destruction, but this does not fit a focus on self-perpetuation, or the worldview of the herd as Nietzsche describes it, which is afraid of destruction and discomfort and is based on resentment against the other rather than affirmation of everything.

[171] BGE ss.4, KSA V p.18; A s.58, KSA VI pp.245–47; EH Destiny s.4, KSA VI pp.362–64.

[172] GM 1.12, I.14–15, III, KSA V pp.277–78, 281–85, 339–412.

[173] TI Antinature s.4, KSA VI p.85.

[174] TI Myth, KSA VI pp.80–81.

to make sense of the world and therefore to interpret it, but we should not make the mistake of believing that these interpretations give knowledge of a way things are beyond the interpretations themselves.

Thus although the later Nietzsche retains the heroic aspect of his early claim that the most beautiful art and glorious myth emerge from insight into the profound suffering of existence, his later emphasis on immanence changes the meaning of this claim. Existence is still characterised by suffering, conflict, and lack of inherent meaning,[175] and Nietzsche continues to advocate appreciating this state of affairs while reorienting oneself towards it as means to affirm life – for example: "How much truth does a spirit *endure*, how much truth does it *dare*? More and more that became for me the real measure of value".[176] However, he insists that this reorientation, although it involves creativity, is not a sublimation of a violent chaos into a gentler and more rational world, but rather a reinterpretation of chaotic and meaningless processes to find them joyful and desirable, without deluding oneself that they are comfortable or kind. Tragedy and horror are not covered over, excused, or justified, but embraced as such: "Pain is *not* considered an objection to life: 'If you have no more happiness to give me, well then! *you still have suffering*'".[177] Genuine affirmation of life is not cosmodicy, but an embracing of all that is, a desiring of the painful as well as the pleasurable. Comforting illusions must be discarded, leaving a life that is painful and contradictory all the way down. In the absence of Apollonian veils of goodness and permanence, we must string the miserable, meaningless episodes of our lives together as something joyful and inspiring, and want life despite – indeed partly because of – its terror, destructiveness, and misery. Thus Nietzsche calls for love of existence, not as a rational or pacified universe in which ultimately everything works out for the best, but as it is – full of pain and conflict: "love – love translated back into nature. Not the love of a 'higher virgin'! [….]

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[175] Z I Afterworldsmen s.1, Z III Vision and the riddle, KSA IV pp.35–38, 197–202; GM II.7, III.15, III.28, KSA V pp.266–68, 372–75, 411–12.

[176] EH Preface s.3, KSA VI p.259.

[177] EH Zarathustra s.1, KSA VI p.336. Nietzsche attributes this phrase to Lou Salomé. See also Z IV Intoxicated song, KSA IV pp.395–404; NCW Epilogue s.1, KSA VI p.436.

But love as *fatum*, as fatality, cynical, innocent, cruel – and precisely in this a piece of nature. That love which is war in its means".[178]

Nietzsche does not advocate viewing a reality beneath lived experiences, but enjoying life without the artificial moral ordering, invented meanings, and phony sense of permanence, substance, and intelligibility that have been handed down and give false reassurance about the comprehensibility and goodness of the universe. Nietzsche wants individuals to create their own interpretations of experiences, connecting them in a way that is beautiful and desirable – including those that are dark and terrible as well as those that are pleasant.

6.4.3 The immanent self

6.4.3.1 Interpretation and identity

Nietzsche's account of the need to interpret experience in order to function, or even to encounter things in a meaningful way, applies to the self as much as the rest of the world. His claim that there is no appearance-reality distinction and no substances behind events extends to the human being, which he claims has no soul or substance. Deeds and events are not expressions of something underlying them, whether an essence or person or supra-personal absolute, but outcomes of processes to which conscious life remains largely blind and of which it can only be aware through an interpretation such as the subject.[179] Instead, the self is a set of sensations, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, urges, instincts, and so on, centred on the body – which, however, Nietzsche claims is also not a unitary substance, but an interpretation of these same perceptions and urges as a single entity.[180] Meaning and selfhood are not originally constructed on the basis of a subject; rather, the latter is one possible manifestation of a more fundamental power of directing oneself towards experiences.

On Nietzsche's account, the self pulls itself together into a single entity out of drives and processes, not through conscious effort by a pre-existing being, but

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[178] CW s.2, KSA VI p.15; see also EH Clever s.10, KSA VI pp.295–97.

[179] See BGE ss.16–17, 34, KSA V pp.29–31, 52–54; GM I.13, KSA V pp.278–81; TI Reason s.5, KSA VI pp.77–78.

[180] Z I Despisers, KSA IV pp.39–41; BGE s.10, KSA V pp.22–24.

as one or more of these forces induces more-or-less complete, more-or-less transient unifications of the others, imposing an identity on the aggregate. There is no inherent harmony between the drives and processes that are held together in provisional constellations to constitute this identity. The self-affirming individual, like the world as a whole, is constituted by forces that are violent and destructive as well as ones that are gentle or "good", and is always full of contradictions: "all of us have, unconsciously, involuntarily in our bodies values, words, formulas, moralities of opposite descent".[181] Uniting these opposites, pulling contradictory elements into a coherent whole, is how individuals create themselves. Selfhood emerges from the confluence and tensions between diverse processes and forces, which are shaped and run together in various ways to create forms that may be fruitful, vibrant, and productive, or limiting, stifling, and stagnant.

The presence of contradictions and tensions is not for Nietzsche a problem for affirming existence; rather, he believes that these can be stimulating, inducing one to live and love life. Indeed, greatness is largely a matter of imposing order and form on the largest possible number of powerfully conflicting tendencies.[182] One should not eliminate tensions or aspects of experiences that one dislikes, but combine them into a form that one endorses as a whole. Instead of forcing oneself into a mould, for Nietzsche one's self should take form organically, according to what he calls an "organising idea". Accidents, misunderstandings, and chance events are shaped into a coherent, ideally beautiful and glorious, whole, but not through imposing an ideal upon them; rather, the principle by which they are unified should emerge from within the bundle of forces, drives, perceptions, and tendencies that one embodies, as one or more of these becomes dominant and provides order and direction to the whole:

> At this point the real answer to the question, *how one becomes what one is*, can no longer be avoided. [....] The whole surface of consciousness – consciousness *is* a surface – must be kept clear of all great imperatives. Beware even of every great word, every great pose! So many dangers that

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[181] CW Epilogue, KSA VI p.53.
[182] Nietzsche claims admiringly of Zarathustra, "In every word he contradicts, this most Yes-saying of all spirits; in him all opposites are blended into a new unity" (EH Zarathustra s.6, KSA VI p.343; see also NCW Apostle s.2, KSA VI pp.429–30).

the instinct comes too soon to "understand itself" –. Meanwhile the organising "idea" that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down – it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means toward a whole – one by one, it trains all *subservient* capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, "goal", "aim", or "meaning".[183]

6.4.3.2 Mind and body

Despite this lack of transparency and rational control, the mind participates in this practice of interpretive self-construction. However, it has no privileged position in the process, and is not, on Nietzsche's account, basically different from other elements of life. Nietzsche denies mind-body dualism, as well as moral systems based on this dualism. Conscious aspects of experience are not separate from those we perceive as physical and attribute to the body; rather, "the 'spirit' itself is after all merely an aspect of this metabolism."[184] Spiritual and intellectual aspects of experience, such as reason, consciousness, or the soul, are outgrowths of bodily needs and processes. It is only the moral-religious interpretation of spirit that casts it as otherworldly, unitary, and given, demands it control one's actions, and problematises its connection to the body and the status of the body as valuable. On Nietzsche's model, these conscious and intellectual elements are not privileged, but must be combined like all other processes and drives into a self under the guidance of a drive that may or may not be conscious.

Spiritual salvation is, therefore, simply another facet of physical health. To feel joy in life and be creative and powerful one must not conform to moral demands, but take care of the body: "I am much more interested in a question on which the 'salvation of humanity' depends far more than on any theologians' curio: the question of *nutrition*. For ordinary use, one may formulate it thus: 'how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength, of *virtu* in the Renaissance style, of moraline-free virtue?'"[185] Interpreting experience in a way that encourages this care is fundamental to affirming life.

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[183] EH Clever s.9, KSA VI pp.293–294.

[184] EH Clever s.2, KSA VI p.282; see also BGE s.3, KSA V pp.17–18.

[185] EH Clever s.1, KSA VI p.279. Nietzsche's strange quasi-autobiographical account of climate and dietary habits in *Ecce Homo* reveals the extent of his commitment to the claim that the

6.4.4 Interpretation, art, and health

This model makes affirming life a matter of surfaces, of shaping experiences to be immediately desirable rather than significant (especially morally significant) and having value on the basis of this significance. The example of music reveals how the later Nietzsche thinks affirmation is a question of creating beautiful, inspiring, strong, healthy forms, rather than attributing meaning. He sees music as pulling surface elements (sounds) into constellations that are themselves beautiful figures that demand affirmation, and that promote the health, and hence self-affirmation, of the audience. Analogously, he believes that strong individuals not only affirm themselves, but invite the affirmation of existence by others: "A glance, grant me but one glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something of which there is still something to fear! Of a man who justifies *man*, of a complementary and redeeming lucky hit on the part of man for the sake of which one may hold on to *belief in man*!"[186] In the next chapter, I ask what this means for Nietzsche's account of social relations (7.4.2); here, I use the case of music to illustrate how for Nietzsche the affirmation of human existence can and should take place without reference to a real world behind experiences.

For Nietzsche, not all works of art (and not all people) promote an affirming stance to life; it is possible to shape experiences into forms that denigrate, impoverish, and weaken, as well as affirm, enrich, and strengthen: "In regard to all artists of any kind whatsoever, I shall now avail myself of this radical distinction: does the creative power in this case arise from a loathing of life, or from an excessive *plenitude* of life?"[187] Nietzsche takes music as an exemplary artform in which these tendencies can be viewed. He argues that "healthy" music, as opposed to music (like Wagner's) that "makes sick",[188] stems from a vibrant, vigorous source, and correspondingly invigorates the listener and promotes

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physical is more important to human existence than is the moral or spiritual (EH Preface s.2, Clever ss.2–3, Dawn s.2, KSA VI pp.257–58, 281–86, 330–32; TI Errors s.8, KSA VI pp.96–97; NCW Objections, KSA VI pp.418–20; CW s.3, Postscript, KSA VI pp.16–19, 40–45). Del Caro provides an account of the importance to Nietzsche of mundane, seemingly petty things for affirmation in *Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric*, p.212ff.

[186] GM 1.12, KSA V p.278; see also Preface, s.6, KSA V pp.252–53; Z Prologue s.5, KSA IV pp.18–21; GS s.352, KSA III p.588; TI Expeditions ss.37–38, KSA VI pp.136–40.

[187] NCW Antipodes, KSA VI p.426.

[188] CW s.5, KSA VI p.21.

strength, generosity, joy, and other attributes that he thinks characterise the ascending form of life. In other words, aesthetic qualities of works of art are reducible to their status as symptoms and fosterers of physical characteristics.[189]

The element of music that Nietzsche stresses with regard to encouraging the "ascending" form of life is rhythm, which provides order and relation.[190] He claims that Wagner's music weakens and enervates because it underplays rhythm in favour of presenting dramatic action, arousing affects, and communicating ideas.[191] According to Nietzsche, using music as a means of expression in this way makes it function like a language: Instead of allowing the progression of sounds to be enjoyed for its own sake, it posits something behind it that gives it meaning. Notes and rhythms are judged by their ability to express something, rather than appreciated as inherently valuable. Consequently, the ability of music to function as a beautiful surface, that is, a collection of rhythms and tones, which is enjoyed for itself and makes one healthy, is undermined.[192]

This marks a shift away from Nietzsche's earlier views on music and metaphysics. *The Birth of Tragedy* presented Wagner as the successor to Greek tragedy, insofar as both combine (Dionysian) music and (Apollonian) image to mediate awareness of reality. Now, Nietzsche denies the existence of a reality behind appearances. He wants the arts to function without reference to something beyond themselves. Rather than partially revealing a concealed realm, art is an original experience that is valuable and beautiful in itself (cf 3.5).

Similarly, life is an original experience, valuable and desirable in itself and not through reference to something else such as God, eternal life, progress, truth,

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[189] "Aesthetic is indeed nothing more than applied physiology" (NCW Objections, KSA VI p.418).
[190] Nietzsche describes the tempo of the metabolism as determining whether one exemplifies an ascending or descending form of life (EH Clever s.2, KSA VI pp.281–83).
[191] CW ss.8, 10, KSA VI pp.29–32, 35–37; NCW Objections, KSA VI pp.418–20.
[192] Although Nietzsche writes as if some music inherently demands appreciation as a surface while some, like Wagner's, invites reading meaning into the sounds, one might ask whether what matters is the music itself or the attitude of the audience. The same piece might be taken by one listener as a beautiful surface and by another as having a significance apart from its rhythms and tones. Nietzsche's account suggests that a composer's intention to communicate is likely to undermine her ability to create a beautiful, stimulating surface. This is what happens with Wagner, whose music loses its rhythm in its attempt to talk about metaphysics.

or a rational world-order.[193] Typically, human beings have been interpreted as subjects on the basis of an extrapolation from their actions to a given substance that is assumed to lie behind them, and evaluated by measuring this substance against an external moral standard. On Nietzsche's model, they should instead be appreciated on the basis of the beauty and/or grandeur of the shape of their lives, taken, not as attributes of an underlying subject, but as they appear. That is, they should be valued on the basis of the extent to which their acts and gestures are pulled together into a shape that is impressive. In *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, Nietzsche returns to his earlier glorification of the Greeks, but now attributes their aesthetic justification of life to their ability to affirm appearances:

> Oh these Greeks, they understood the art of living! For this it is needful to
> halt bravely at the surface, at the fold, at the skin, to worship appearance,
> and to believe in forms, tones, words, and the whole Olympus of
> appearance! These Greeks were superficial—from profundity.… And are we
> not returning to precisely the same thing, we dare-devils of intellect [...]?
> Are we not precisely in this respect—Greeks? Worshippers of form, of
> tones, of words? Precisely on that account—artists?[194]

6.5 Conclusion

As in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the later Nietzsche maintains that existence is justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, but he alters the meaning of what it is both to justify existence and to be aesthetic. Aesthetics are reduced to physical characteristics, with life's aesthetic character presented as its strength, health, and creativity, and its ability to take an appearance that inspires these in others. Justification is a question of being motivated to want or endorse something, rather than its moral rectitude: life is "justified", not by reference to a scheme of values that reveals it to be "good", but insofar as it is something one desires. In other words, justification is immediate, rather than mediated by reasons. Strength,

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[193] Nietzsche ends "The case of Wagner" with three demands: "*That the theater should not be lord over the arts. That the actor should not seduce those who are authentic. That music should not become an art of lying*" (CW s.12, KSA VI p.39). We can read these as extending to life in general: The most important thing about experiences should not be their ability to express something, but their capacity to be beautiful; the subject should not be invoked as a substratum, precluding living with immediate reference to experience; the beauty and grandeur of life should not be reduced to a language, symbolising something transcending it which does not exist.
[194] NCW Epilogue s.2, KSA VI p.439.

health, creativity, beauty, and power are physical characteristics that are intrinsically desirable. In his account of Greek religion and myth in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche starts along this path, describing the Greeks as affirming life on the basis, not of a moral evaluation, but of the gods' desire to live it. The Greek gods were not moral or virtuous, but flawed, passionate, often selfish and violent, but they reveled in life – a more extreme and exuberant version of human life. According to Nietzsche, they thereby allowed the Greeks to affirm that life: "Thus do the gods justify human life: they themselves live it – the only sufficient theodicy!" Life is affirmed despite evil and suffering not because these are part of God's plan or a rational world order, but because it is desired.[195] The later Nietzsche brings this desire for life back from its projection onto mythical figures into the lived experiences of human beings, as not gods, but individuals themselves, affirm life by revelling in it with all its passion and violence.

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[195] BT s.3, KSA I p.36; see also s.5, KSA I pp.42–48.

Chapter 7 Community II: Consciousness, society, and the individual

7.1 Introduction

In addition to requiring that an affirmation of existence be immanent, the later
Nietzsche promotes an individual, rather than social, construction of an affirming
worldview. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche depicted the Greek community as
sharing myths, stories, artforms, ceremonies, performances, customs, and morals
that allowed them to affirm life in the face of their realisation of its essential
tragedy. For the later Nietzsche, however, one's means of ordering life should be
one's own, created as much as possible independently rather than with a
community. This chapter explores why Nietzsche thinks this should be the case.

For the later Nietzsche, social life has been responsible both for the
development of consciousness and individuality and for the alienation that
characterises modern existence. As a result, the affirmation of the individual is
both made possible and limited by her social origins, the restrictions of which
Nietzsche thinks she must struggle to escape. I argue that Nietzsche's accounts of
language and consciousness, suffering, power, and freedom lead to an exacerbated
alienation and sense of isolation in tension with the self-affirmation he advocates.

7.2 Society, sophistication, and alienation

7.2.1 Language, consciousness, and alienation

For Nietzsche, communication and consciousness are intrinsically alienating. On
his account, consciousness emerged in the service of language, to facilitate
communication and thus the co-ordination of groups of human beings. To make
experiences communicable, human beings had to categorise and name them, i.e.,
articulate them discursively, in the process representing and becoming aware of
them.[196] The development of language to allow groups to communicate thus had
as a side-effect the emergence of consciousness. On the one hand, Nietzsche
complains that this has led to the simplification and levelling of experience, the
richness and uniqueness of which we force into universal moulds: "We no longer

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[196] GS s.209, KSA III p.507.

have a sufficiently high estimate of ourselves when we communicate. Our true experiences […] could not communicate themselves if they wanted to: they lack words. […] Speech, it seems, was devised only for the average, medium, communicable. The speaker has already *vulgarised* himself by speaking".[197] In expressing or even thinking about themselves, human beings are alienated from themselves, others, and their world. On the other hand, consciousness enables an inner life and new forms of experience. An effect of the conceptualisation of experience has been to constitute human beings as atomistic subjects in relation to similarly atomistic objects. Although this misrepresents the complexity and depth of experience, it also constructs human beings as individuals. As conscious individuals, human beings reflect on themselves, others, and their surroundings, which enables new ways of fostering their survival and flourishing, new behaviours and attitudes – in short, new ways of life.[198]

7.2.2 Morality, alienation, and the subject

This process of sophistication and alienation is repeated and refined in the development of group morality as Nietzsche describes it. Nietzsche's narrative has contemporary society as the outcome of a successful play for power by those who were too weak to affirm themselves spontaneously or grasp power directly, and so had to use devious means to realise their drives for dominance and self-protection. These groups had to be clever to gain and maintain power, leading to the loss of the ability to affirm life spontaneously, and also the warping, changing, and elaboration of ways of being, which became increasingly reflective.[199]

Despite his admiration for the spontaneous expression of drives, Nietzsche stresses the dependence of culture and intellectual life on their sublimation into something more conscious, more complex, and less immediate. The social relations that emerge from this move constitute human beings as highly

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[197] TI Expeditions s.26, KSA VI p.128; see also GS *passim*, KSA III pp.342–651. I address in 9.2.2 whether Nietzsche thinks we can have access to prelinguistic experience, and the status of his claims about the stunting or misrepresentation of these experiences in conscious life.
[198] TI Reason s.5, KSA VI pp.77–78; GM II.2, II.16, KSA V pp.293–94, 321–24. See Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche: Life as metaphor," in *The new Nietzsche: Contemporary styles of interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).
[199] GM I.2, I.4, I.8–11, I.13, KSA V pp.258–60, 261–62, 268–77, 278–81.

developed, conscious, spiritualised individuals. The suppression and redirection of drives enforced by systems of punishment and moral and metaphysical ideals furthers the development of more complex forms of these drives and creates new, reflective ways of life. According to Nietzsche, the individual is thus a development that has emerged through particular kinds of social life, with their specific forms of rationality, culture, punishment, and categorisation: "If we place ourselves at the end of this monstrous process, there, where the tree at last brings forth its fruit, where society and its morality of custom at last bring to light *what* they were the means to: then we find as the ripest fruit on its tree the *sovereign individual*".[200] The language and metaphysics that underlie social moralities have promoted the emergence of the human being as a conscious individual. This is also an alienating process, however. Moral systems and systems of punishment demand modification of behaviour to fit human beings for social life, which both requires them to repudiate, suppress, and change some of their urges, and engages them as individual subjects and moral agents.

7.2.3 The conscious individual as alienated from others

Nietzsche identifies an irremediable alienation and separateness from others in the nature of consciousness and in self-identity as an individual agent or subject. Rather than being reduced by interactions with others, as it is for Novalis, for Nietzsche this separation is confirmed and underscored by the inability to really communicate with another person, and the even more fundamental lack of transparency to the self. Interactions with others do not lead to genuine connection or insight into either one's own or the other's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, but reveal the ways in which we misunderstand and misrepresent these: "Must not anyone who wants to move the crowd be an actor who impersonates himself?

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[200] GMII.2, KSA V p.293. *Zarathustra*'s "Of the thousand and one goals" begins by talking of moralities as products of societies (see also GM III, KSA V pp.339–412), but midway through the passage Zarathustra claims: "A change in values – that means a change in the creators of values," adding: "Peoples were the creators at first; only later were individuals creators, indeed, the individual himself is still the latest creation" (KSA IV pp.74–76). Nietzsche directs his goal of self-creation to these late-coming individuals. Social worldviews, that is, those created by societies in response to social needs and which foster the survival and enhancement of power of groups, are to be superseded by individual worldviews, which foster instead individual power and creativity (BGE s.229, KSA V pp.165–67; GM I.10, GM II.18, KSA V pp.270–74, 325–27).

Must he not first translate himself into grotesque obviousness and then present his whole person and cause in this coarsened and simplified version?"[201] Alienation is also entailed by one's interpellation as a moral agent within society, which not only requires subverting or excising parts of oneself while reifying others, but also constructs the human being as an individual who is aware of herself as standing over and against other individuals and answerable to them for her actions.[202] For Nietzsche, alienation is a result not just of the emergence of the self as an individual separate from others and opaque to itself, but also of a conflicting and, he thinks, unsatisfiable need to connect with these others and know oneself, both of which tendencies are exaggerated by social mores.

However, the emergence of particular forms of awareness and selfhood within society also provides the conditions of possibility for Nietzsche's individualistic response to alienation. These forms shape how we encounter life; they are what we have to work with. Furthermore, Nietzsche values the sophistication and culture that prevailing systems of interpretation allow. The solution is therefore not to escape the constitution of the individual through language and consciousness or the use of systems of morals and their supporting metaphysics to foster this development; rather, we should take these up as individuals, changing them to create new myths and systems of constraint for ourselves in order to develop and express our own drives. In other words, we should carry out the egoistic self-affirmation of the "nobles", but using the tools of the "slaves", now modified to suit new needs.[203]

7.3 Individual, society, and alienation

7.3.1 Social and individual contributions to self-creation

7.3.1.1 Social praxis as condition of possibility and limitation

While in theory this should allow the individual to affirm herself, it does not provide an escape from alienation. Indeed, the attempt is itself alienating. In the

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[201] GS s.236, KSA III p.513; see Z Prologue ss.5–8, III Homecoming, KSA IV pp.18–25, 231–34.
[202] EH Destiny s.7, KSA VI pp.364–74. See Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche on autonomy and morality: The challenge to political theory," *Political Studies* 39 (1991): 279.
[203] Z I 1001 goals, KSA IV pp.74–76. In 10.2.2 I discuss the similarity to Novalis' account of the spiral development of absolute self-consciousness through greater consciousness and complexity.

first place, it requires taking up tools (moral systems, consciousness, language) and a form of life (the conscious individual) that Nietzsche sees as alienating constructions. However, it requires using these tools as much as possible in isolation from the social context in which they developed, also alienating oneself from others and the way of life in which one has lived. Nietzsche claims that living on the basis of an interpretation created by others is alienating because, instead of reflecting one's own experiences and creative power, this interpretation reflects the experiences and creative power of others.[204] As such, it promotes the flourishing not of one's own way of life, but of its creators'. Furthermore, as a social construction, this way of life is a group one, which Nietzsche maintains is in many ways opposed to the way of life of the individual – particularly the powerful, self-affirming individual.[205] Since this interpretation does not straightforwardly promote the interests of the individual, in order to adopt it individuals must deny many of their interests and accept elaborate systems of justification for the imposition of these constraints upon themselves.

On the other hand, creating in isolation of one's social milieu is itself alienating, and in any case not really possible. Becoming aware that the way that one encounters the world, even oneself, is socially mediated alienates from these forms, which have shaped one's experiences and identity until this point, without necessarily reconciling one either to this loss or to another way of being. Nietzsche recognises that one cannot simply break free of the worldview in which one is steeped, even having realised that it is alien. The self is inescapably conditioned by its experiences, which, whether epistemological, moral, perceptual, or affective, are permeated by social interpretations.

As a result, the need to create oneself and one's worldview is in tension with one's situatedness in a socially mediated way of life. One commentator claims that for Nietzsche "the drive for autonomy is always a refusal of

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[204] ZI Love of one's neighbour, I Creator, KSA IV pp.77–83; BGE s.40, KSA V pp.57–58. Nietzsche admires those who create their understanding of the world more than those who adhere to an existing one (EH Zarathustra s.6; see also Z IV Higher man s.10, KSA IV p.361).
[205] BGE s.201, KSA V pp.121–23.

community and mediation, a refusal of dependency on the will of another",[206] and it is true that Nietzsche repudiates a straightforward adoption of or immersion in communal perspectives. However, he does not demand complete escape from this context. The influence of others' interpretations on our way of being is an infecting presence that we may strive to throw off, but this process is as much an appropriation of these alien tendencies as a rejection of them. Nietzsche holds that freedom always takes place in a social context, and even the attempt to refuse dependency depends on the conditions of possibility presented by one's socially mediated experiences. As David Owen points out, part of Nietzsche's critique of liberalism is that liberalism fails to recognise the extent to which thinking and acting depend on communal practices: for Nietzsche "our capacities are socially constituted".[207] Herman Siemens also draws attention to Nietzsche's insistence that "our drives are not 'natural,' but learned and assimilated from society or the state."[208] Siemens highlights a passage from Nietzsche's 1881 *Nachlaß*, which describes the emergence of the individual by appropriating the social drives through which she was originally constituted as such:

> [T]he state does not originally oppress individuals: these do not yet exist! It makes existence possible for human beings, as herd animals. Our drives, affects, are first taught us there: they are nothing original! There is no 'state of nature' for them! As part of a whole we take part in their existence conditions and functions and incorporate the thereby created experiences and judgments. These come into struggle and relation with each other later, when the bonds of society degenerate: [the individual] must suffer through the aftereffects of the social organism, he must expiate the judgments and experiences that are inappropriate existence conditions, which were fitting for a *whole*, and eventually he manages to create in himself *his possibility of existence as an individual* through reordering and assimilation, excretion of drives.[209]

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[206] Jay Bernstein, "Autonomy and solitude," in *Nietzsche and modern German thought*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (London: Routledge, 1991), p.215.

[207] David Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity: A critique of liberal reason* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p.138.

[208] Herman Siemens, "Nietzsche *contra* liberalism on freedom," in *A companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), p.440.

[209] KSA IX 11 [182], my translation.

Nietzsche indicates the difficulty of this process, going on to state "Usually these experimental individuals go under." When these individuals first start to emerge, their various drives strive without measure to assert themselves, fragmenting the individual or tearing each other apart, and are not brought into ordered relation to each other – which, as we have seen, is the goal of the great individual. Thus the times in which these individuals arise first are times of "demoralisation, or so-called corruption". Consequently, it may seem that there are only two options: conformity to social mores on the one hand, or, on the other, the uncontrolled, violent, and destructive expression of drives and the resulting fragmentation and dissolution of the self and society.[210]

As we have seen (6.4.3.1), Nietzsche contends that there is a third option: establishing one's own systems for ordering one's drives. Genuinely individual, free selfhood requires not lack of restraint, but imposing one's own measure for integrating drives in a directed whole.[211] Free creativity is the individualised appropriation and use of the tools, capacities, needs, motivations, beliefs, judgments, and perceptions provided by one's social context. Even one's means of forming interpretations are socially conditioned, as Nietzsche's genealogies of language, consciousness, and the individual show. The latter are ingrained with presuppositions that constrain and shape the self, including concepts of substance, atomism, agency, free will, and objectivity.[212] Individual self-affirmation must subvert these categories of consciousness and culture, which constrain her within an interpretation that suits the purposes of the group; but since they are the means by which she encounters the world, she also cannot proceed without them.

This limits the extent to which human beings can be free in the way that matters to Nietzsche – that is, free to create themselves to promote their maximal affirmation of life. Sheridan Hough points out that, although for Nietzsche the self (and correspondingly the world it experiences) is changeable, it is so only within

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[210] Z I Tree on the mountainside, KSA IV pp.51–54.
[211] See Siemens, "Nietzsche *contra* liberalism," and discussions of the nature of freedom in Nietzsche by Ken Gemes, Simon May, and David Owen in *Nietzsche on freedom and autonomy*, ed. Ken Gemes and Simon May (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.42, 90, and 215 respectively; also Bradford Vivian, "Freedom, naming, nobility: The convergence of rhetorical and political theory in Nietzsche's philosophy," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40:4 (2007): p.382.
[212] TI Reason s.5, KSA VI pp.77–78; BGE Prejudices, esp. s.21, KSA V pp.15–39, esp. 35–36.

limits. Creation for Nietzsche is a process of joint discovery and alteration: "Familial, educational, and cultural forces come together in shaping an individual, and that inheritance, although not 'metaphysical', is nonetheless 'foundational'. [... A] person's creative activity is not therefore a series of arbitrary interests or creative 'whim', but an investigation of this 'inheritance', which is not *itself* created or willed."[213] Although this foundation is in principle changeable, in practice total change is impossible for any individual, taking too much time to gain the necessary distance from the most central beliefs, urges, and perceptions that one inherits. In other words, while socially constructed meanings do not provide absolute boundaries to self-creation, they do provide practical limits as well as a framework upon which to build new ways of being. Older, more widely held and well-established interpretations or "prejudices" – such as the soul, or the body – are more difficult to discard or alter than more recent inventions. The freedom of the individual to create herself is thus always constrained.

According to Hough, Nietzsche celebrates rather than bemoans these limits: "the person living what Nietzsche describes as the highest life understands and celebrates the narrow scope of human autonomy".[214] However, while Nietzsche acknowledges the constraints of social life on the individual, and accepts that individuals can only work through these constraints, his attitude towards these limits is at least ambivalent. As we have seen, he sees social practices as creating the individual and constituting her as enabled in certain ways, but also as stifling, weakening, repressing, falsifying, and leveling human beings, and eventually leading to nihilism. The conditions of possibility that social life provides are necessary, but are also to be struggled against.

Like Hough, Aaron Ridley stresses Nietzsche's positive claims about the social construction of the individual, using an analogy to argue that Nietzsche sees these as not only conditions of possibility for action, but not even real constraints:

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[213] Sheridan Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend: The self as metaphoric double* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p.xxiv; see also pp.10–11.
[214] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, p.xv.

> A person who insisted, for example, that 'submitting abjectly' to the 'capricious' rules of grammar and punctuation inhibited or limited his powers of linguistic expression would show that he had no idea what linguistic expression *was*. [... I]t is only by working with and through those rules [...] that effective linguistic expression is so much as possible. [... O]n this picture, clearly enough, 'constraint', 'law' or 'compulsion' feature, not as limits on our powers of acting, but as their *sine qua non*.[215]

The linguistic analogy should already make us suspicious of Ridley's claim insofar as it is supposed to apply to Nietzsche. As we have seen, Nietzsche views language as particularly problematic for the exercise of freedom and the escape from dogmatic metaphysics, trapping its users in metaphysical categories that miscommunicate experiences and enforce similarity and deceit, and furthering the damaging myths of atomism and subjectivity.[216] Although language enables new forms of self-realisation, its adoption by the individual also mobilises these characteristics, which she must struggle to subvert.

Robert Guay shares Ridley's position, going so far as to argue that the need for a social context in order to make meaning entails that "There is no contest in Nietzsche between the lonely individual and the tyrannical crowd".[217] Ridley and Guay claim that the conventions through which one acts and realises one's freedom are, for Nietzsche, necessarily public, but this is not the whole story. For Nietzsche, we need social practices for our actions to make sense, but in order to be free we also need in some sense to set ourselves outside them, creating our own, individual practices and ways of giving meaning. In other words, the fact that we need a public praxis in order to act and understand our actions does not entail that this practice does not inhibit our freedom. While Nietzsche does maintain that constituting the self as free depends on rules and conventions, this requires not rules and conventions that are shared by society, but rather the establishment of one's own. He has Zarathustra ask "Do you call yourself free? I

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[215] Ridley, Aaron, "Nietzsche on art and freedom," *European Journal of Philosophy* 15:2 (2007):, 210; see pp.208–210.

[216] TI Reason s.5, KSA VI pp.77–78.

[217] Robert Guay, "Nietzsche on Freedom," *European Journal of Philosophy* 10:3 (2002): 317. Guay argues that for Nietzsche freedom is realised through the manipulation of social practices and conventions. Guay claims that actions are meaningless, and so impossible, without a social context, and so: "Constraints are thus productive: they create the possibility of novel activities" (p.308; see also p.314).

want to hear your ruling idea, not that you have escaped from a yoke", and denigrate those who are unable to establish their own ruling idea.[218] Freedom is not absence of constraint, but neither is it the constraint of the self by others; it is self-constraint, or self-mastery.[219] Nietzsche's model of the self is, as I have described, premised on the need to unify conflicting drives, not with reference to an external ideal or through the imposition of order by another, but through the organic emergence of a dominant tendency from within oneself.

What is valuable in Guay's and Ridley's accounts is their identification of the tension that Nietzsche perceives between establishing one's own rule and the dependence of the ability to do so on one's social nature. However, Nietzsche does not see the social recognition of individual enterprise as resolving this tension. Rather, this remains an irreconcilable opposition that must be continually negotiated. The inescapable embeddedness of activity in social praxis and the alienation that this engenders are in an unavoidable conflict that forms the basis of repeated attempts by the individual to reformulate herself.[220]

7.3.1.2 Alienation and liberation

While Nietzsche's vision for individual self-creation has the individual struggling against existing social practices within which she is embedded, and thus traps the individual within a cycle of alienation, this is not at all an incoherent model. One can imagine an iterative process in which one resists and subverts one's conditioning by continually modifying new ways of being that move successively further from their basis in social interpretations of experience. Indeed, this is what Nietzsche advocates in his demand for a continual destruction and recreation of worldviews.[221] Nietzsche plausibly identifies a tension between the experience of

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[218] Z I Creator, KSA IV p.81; see also A s.11, KSA VI p.177–78.

[219] For discussion of the difference between a notion of freedom as absence of constraint and a Nietzschean idea of freedom as self-mastery, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The significance of Michel Foucault's reading of Nietzsche: Power, the subject, and political theory," *Nietzsche-Studien* 20 (1991): 267-83; Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*; John Richardson, "Nietzsche's freedoms," in Gemes and May, *Nietzsche on freedom and autonomy*; Siemens, "Nietzsche *contra* liberalism"; Vivian, "Freedom, naming, nobility".

[220] Guay notes, "The dependence on historical communities for the social possibility of freedom renders our attempts at self-direction inescapably provisional" ("Nietzsche on freedom," p.317).

[221] Z II Blissful islands, Z II Self-overcoming, KSA IV pp.109–112, 146–49.

ourselves and the universe as given in certain socially mediated forms, and the need and capacity to recreate these as individuals, but it is a productive, as well as an alienating, tension. Nietzsche sees this tension as the starting point for constructing oneself as a great individual. Consistently with his account of the self who creates itself by imposing direction and order on diverse and conflicting drives and needs, the tension between the need for individual development and the constraints of society can be integrated in – and indeed provide a stimulating impetus to – the creation of dramatic, grand, and beautiful forms:

> There is no necessary contrast between sensuality and chastity [...]. This, at least, ought to hold good of all well-constituted and good-spirited mortals, who are not in the least inclined to reckon their unstable equilibrium between angel and *petite bête*, without further ado, among the objections to existence, the more refined and more intelligent like Hafis and Goethe even regarded it as an additional attraction. It is precisely contradictions of this kind which lure us to life....[222]

The self-affirming individual must negotiate and learn to endorse this tension and the alienation it engenders: something Nietzsche envisions as a painful struggle. It is extremely upsetting and difficult to give up the sense of companionship that comes from sharing a way of life and worldview. The self-affirming individual is not a mere rebel and resister of social mores; she is an outcast, a criminal, a monster. Nietzsche attributes the ability to delight in the painful nature of existence to those who, in affirming their "evil" tendencies as much as their "good" ones, unleash their monstrous creative power, breaking with traditional systems of interpretation to create their own: "the strength required for the vision of the most powerful reality is not only compatible with the most powerful strength for action, for monstrous action, for crime – it even presupposes it".[223] Zarathustra describes this break as painful and involving the self in actions that make it uncomfortable: "The voice of the herd will still ring within you. And when you say: 'We have no longer the same conscience, you and I', it will be a

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[222] NCW Apostle s.2, KSA VI p.429.
[223] EH Clever s.4, KSA VI p.287; see also NCW Antipodes, KSA VI pp.424–27; CW Epilogue, KSA VI pp.50–53.

lament and a grief. See, even this pain itself belongs to that one conscience: and this conscience's last glimmer still glows in your affliction."[224]

Some commentators have interpreted the painfulness of this isolation as showing that it cannot succeed as a means to self-affirmation. Bernstein argues that, since for Nietzsche "Autonomy is a work of solitude," it is an alienating, life-negating project, which "terminates in the worldless, death-in-life solitude of the philosopher-legislator".[225] Daniel Conway claims that the painfulness and ultimate failure of Zarathustra's solitude suggests that the goal of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is to critique such a voluntaristic and individualistic response to social alienation rather than to promote it.[226] Both these interpretations are misleading, although they make useful points. Bernstein is right that the outcome of Nietzsche's project of self-creation is an alienated and lonely existence that tends to strike the reader as difficult to affirm, and furthermore, as I argue below, he is right that the rejection of community as a positive contribution to this project is problematic. Conway is right, too, that Nietzsche himself points up the difficulty and incompleteness of this task, considered as a solution to nihilism. However, Nietzsche's awareness of these difficulties does not dissuade him from demanding that we embrace our capacity to struggle against social constraints in order to recreate ourselves according to our own values. As we have seen, Nietzsche not only accepts suffering, but endorses it, meaning that the discomfort of isolation does not count against it, and moreover he is clear that creativity and freedom require the unleashing of powers that, as social beings, we tend to feel should be suppressed. The fact that we cannot currently see the appeal of the isolated existence of the creative individual does not mean that this way of being is not a valid means of responding to alienation, but rather that we need to change in order to take joy in such a way of being. It is the painfulness and isolation of the individual who affirms herself that prompts Nietzsche to claim not only that

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[224] Z I Creator, KSA IV p.80; see also GM III.20, KSA V pp.387–90.
[225] Jay Bernstein, "Autonomy and solitude," pp.212–13. I avoid using the term "autonomy" for Nietzsche's notion of freedom: as I argue in 7.4.1, he subverts this concept in a number of ways.
[226]Daniel Conway, "Thus spoke Rorty: The perils of narrative self-creation," *Philosophy and Literature* 15 (1991): 107–8.

creators are hard, but that they must *become* hard.[227] Embracing the isolation of the creator and hardening oneself to its pain does not save us from alienation, but is for Nietzsche the means to coping with our alienated situation without relying on structures of interpretation and legitimation that falsely purport to be objective, while rediscovering stifled, warped, and neglected aspects of the self.

7.3.2 Suffering, the self, and the other

Nietzsche repeats often the demand to harden oneself against social conditioning and the desire for companionship.[228] However, there is a difference in the kind of hardening that he advocates towards one's own painful experiences and towards those of others. Neither should be allowed to undermine joy in life, but whereas we should embrace our own pain and affirm it, Nietzsche maintains that we should suppress the experience of others' pain. Nietzsche's philosophy of affirmation rejects empathic connections with others as detrimental to the ability to affirm life and the self. I suggest that this is an inadequacy of his account in two respects: it denies important experiences a place in the project of self-affirmation, and it excludes possibilities for ways of being together that could help affirm life. I argue that Nietzsche may allow experiences regarding others' suffering to form part of one's self-affirmation in a certain sense, but that this is based on a self-directed revaluation of one's experience of pity, and does not genuinely engage with the other and his pain as such.

7.3.2.1 Pity and others' suffering

Nietzsche finds problematic for individual self-affirmation not only group values in general, but in particular those he associates with Christianity and democracy. These include pity, care for the weak, altruism, and the suppression of vigourous and vital drives, which are presented as egoistic and dangerous. He sees these as incompatible with affirming life: "I take the overestimation of goodness and benevolence on a large scale for a consequence of decadence, for a symptom of

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[227] Z III Law-tables s.29, KSA IV p.268; see also Z I Creator, KSA IV p.81; EH Preface s.3, KSA VI pp.258–59.
[228] E.g., A s.2, KSA VI p.170; Z III Gravity s.2, KSA IV pp.242–45.

weakness, irreconcilable with an ascending, Yes-saying life: negating *and destroying* are conditions of saying Yes". Social values promote a life-denying worldview: "To consider distress of all kinds as an objection, as something that must be abolished, is the *niaiserie par excellence* and, on a large scale, a veritable disaster in its consequences, a nemesis of stupidity – almost as stupid as would be the desire to abolish bad weather – say, from pity for poor people."[229]

Nietzsche presents empathy with others' suffering as life-negating for many reasons. He claims that it restrains the life-affirming, creative-destructive urges of the strong, and that viewing others' weakness and ugliness makes it harder to affirm life.[230] David Cartwright lists other problems with pity that Nietzsche identifies: that it increases the sum total of suffering in the world, as "suffering itself becomes contagious through pity";[231] that acting out of pity is a response to one's own pain, rather than to another's need; that inciting pity is a means for the weak and suffering to hurt and gain power over others; that feeling pity exposes one to manipulation by the person one pities – a threat to one's autonomy; that, conversely, one may pity in order to feel superior to and gain control over the one whom one pities; that being pitied is humiliating and pitying a form of contempt; and that this humiliation can encourage the pitied party to take revenge.[232] Rather than allowing oneself to feel others' pain, Nietzsche suggests one should harden oneself to it, even excise it,[233] famously maintaining that those who cannot affirm their lives, including their suffering, should be abandoned to their self-destructive nihilism: "The weak and ill-constituted shall perish: first principle of *our* philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so."[234] The sight of the miserable should not be allowed to drag down the joyful life-affirmation of the strong.

The gut reaction of the reader to these claims is likely to be negative, but Nietzsche's account allows for this intuition, suggesting that it results from social

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[229] EH Destiny s.4, KSA VI p.368.
[230] A ss.7, 38, KSA VI pp.172–74, 209–211; GS s.290, KSA III pp.530–31.
[231] A s.7, KSA VI p.173; see also Z III Law-tables s.20, KSA IV p.262.
[232] See Z II Compassionate, KSA IV p.113–16. Cartwright points out that Nietzsche takes many of these criticisms of pity directly from Kant. David E. Cartwright, "Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche on the morality of pity," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45:1 (1984): 83–98.
[233] A s.7, KSA VI pp.172–74.
[234] A s.2, KSA VI p.170; see also A s.7, KSA VI pp.172–74.

conditioning according to the very values he rejects. The desire to help those weaker than ourselves is the kind of feeling against which he thinks we need to harden ourselves. Furthermore, although Nietzsche's response to the inevitability of pain and death seems to dismiss the suffering of others, his insistence that affirmation must not minimise or explain away suffering and evil does at least urge honesty about what one endorses when one endorses life. As such, it involves a kind of recognition of the pain and despair of others. Nietzsche does not claim that this pain is deserved, illusory, or ultimately all for the best, but that we should not take the reality and meaninglessness of this pain to count against the affirmation of ourselves and life in general.[235]

However, even on this charitable interpretation, the result is problematic. The demand for hardness towards others' suffering excludes an important aspect of human experience that, I suggest, should be incorporated in an affirmation of life in all its richness and difficulty. That is, the experiences that we must affirm include not only our own perceptions, desires, needs, and urges, but also those of others. Hardening oneself against others' experiences denies a real and valuable part of one's experience: the sharing of others' pain (and indeed happiness). In other words, if we are to create something powerful and beautiful out of our lives, this should include a place for others' suffering, not as something we witness as irrelevant or only instrumentally relevant to us, but as something we feel, take on board, and incorporate into our way of life. Rather than excluding this experience from the life we affirm, denying, suppressing, and rejecting empathic experiences of others, we should incorporate them as part of experience, to be recreated as part of something we affirm, as with our own pain. Suffering with people need not count against life any more than suffering on one's own account. In fact, incorporating the second-hand experiences available through empathy should allow a richer, more powerful affirmation of life and the self, even if it is more difficult to do so than to affirm only one's own suffering. In short, it is a mistake to think that affirming the self in the light of other people's suffering requires hardening oneself to it, as Nietzsche often seems to suggest. Rather, like one's

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[235] NCW Epilogue s.1, KSA VI pp.436–37; GM II.7, KSA V pp.302–5.

own pain, one should feel the pain of others and still desire it; like one's own, it should be an impetus to creativity and overcoming.[236]

In places, Nietzsche's work seems amenable to interpretation along these lines. Although he sometimes claims that pity should be excised (for example lauding Aristotle for recognising that pity must periodically be "purged" and claiming we must be physicians who "wield the knife" against pity[237]), Michael Frazer and Loralea Michaelis have argued that Nietzsche calls for including others' suffering in one's project of self-overcoming. Both claim that, rather than demanding that others' suffering be rejected from one's experience, Nietzsche requires experiencing, but changing one's attitude towards, this suffering as part of a project of self-overcoming.[238] Frazer draws attention to the passage "The cry of distress" in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, in which Zarathustra must overcome his final weakness: pity.[239] Against those, such as Martha Nussbaum, Robert Pippin, and Stanley Rosen, who argue that Zarathustra's victory over compassion is accomplished by deciding to no longer feel sorry for others,[240] Frazer maintains that it requires continuing to feel this pity, but harnessing the misery that it brings in order to be creative, in much the same way as one harnesses any other form of

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[236] One might be uncomfortable affirming another's pain in the way one affirms one's own, deciding it is desirable in itself. It is one thing to endorse one's own tragedy; another to do the same for someone else. It is a strength of Nietzsche's account that he insists that the affirmation of one's life must be performed by the individual herself – no one else can decide for her whether her life is worth living. But this point is not affected by including others' suffering in one's revaluation of existence. Nietzsche's perspectivism allows more than one interpretation of events, meaning that one person can affirm life with all its pain (one's own and others') while another may decide it is not worth living. Demanding that a person accede to one's affirmation of their pain would suggest universally applicable tables of value and disinterested evaluation of one's experiences, and potentially a denial of the perhaps irredeemable (for some people) seriousness of suffering.

[237] A s.7, KSA VI p.174.

[238] Michael L. Frazer, "The compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on sympathy and strength," *Review of Politics* 68:1 (2006): 73; Loralea Michaelis, "Politics and the art of suffering in Hölderlin and Nietzsche," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27:5 (2001): 101.

[239] Z IV The cry of distress, KSA IV pp.300–303.

[240] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Pity and mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism," in *Nietzsche, genealogy, morality: Essays on Nietzsche's* On the genealogy of morals, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp.139, 152; Robert Pippin, "Irony and affirmation in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," in *Nietzsche's new seas: Explorations in philosophy, aesthetics and politics*, ed. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.64; Stanley Rosen, *Mask of enlightenment* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.228, 244.

suffering.[241] Similarly, Michaelis claims that Nietzsche does not argue against suffering on another's behalf – he presupposes that we do so – but for sublimating this pain into something productive, that is, using it to increase one's power.[242]

If it is the case that Nietzsche sometimes demands, not a rejection of pity, but its transformation into something life-affirming, there is still the question of what it means to incorporate another's suffering in an affirming reconstruction of one's life. Is it to allow oneself to experience and reorient oneself towards another's pain, or towards one's own feelings of pity – to a particular form of suffering that we ourselves undergo?[243] The latter would be a self-directed mastering of an effect that others have on us – an acknowledgement that we cannot help but be influenced by others, and a demand to take possession of these influences. In other words, it is an appropriation of a socially conditioned affect of the sort that I described above (7.3.1): an attempt to break free of one's inevitable herd background and conditions of possibility, not an endorsement of oneself as a social being. This response to pity is indeed compatible with Nietzsche's account, despite his conflicting statements that claim we should rid ourselves of pity.

Both Frazer and Michaelis claim that the revaluation of pity in Nietzsche's account is based on a genuine empathic connection with others, not a merely self-directed means of coping with one's weakness for experiencing pity. That is, they claim Nietzsche wants to take into account the reality of others' experiences of suffering, not just the effects of these on oneself. However, Frazer's account of Zarathustra's temptation suggests revalorising one's own pity, rather than another's suffering (indeed, the higher men whom Zarathustra pities do not even appear in the passage, but are heard in the distance). Nonetheless, Frazer claims that pity is itself based on a genuine experience of otherness, as one breaks through the principle of individuation to share another's suffering: "the strength of one's imagination allows for a bridging of the divide between individuals and the

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[241] Frazer, "The compassion of Zarathustra," p.70.

[242] Michaelis, "Politics," p.108.

[243] One might be tempted to put this difference in terms of the distinction between pity and compassion, which both translate the German *Mitleid*, but the distinction I want to talk about does not quite map onto the distinction between pity (damaging) and compassion (permissible) that has been drawn by other commentators; and furthermore I do not want to presuppose that Nietzsche is talking about two different affects here rather than two possible responses to the same affect.

picturing of another's suffering from his own perspective."[244] Below (7.4.1), I give more reasons why attributing this sort of openness to Nietzsche is unwarranted, but for now let us merely note that Frazer's claim is based on an ontology that Nietzsche presents only in his early work and later repudiates.

Michaelis' account is more plausible: she maintains that Nietzsche takes for granted that we have genuine empathic connections with others, and that his attack on pity must be taken in the context of a socio-political climate in which these connections have been encouraged to run riot, with the detrimental effects he identifies. Thus Nietzsche's call to reorient oneself to pity (not allowing it to rule one's behaviour, not attempting to alleviate others' suffering, not deriving from the sight of others' pain a sense of meaningless and despair) is meant as an antidote to this tendency. In other words, he emphasises only the latter of the two following elements that should both be present in a response to others' suffering: the ability to be moved by others' pain, and the ability to remain in control of oneself as one is so moved. Michaelis admits that, in his concern to undermine the prevailing emphasis on the former, Nietzsche overemphasises the latter, focussing on the damaging effects of too much pity rather than on our ability to take on board the experiences of others: thus, "he falls prey to the temptation to celebrate models of strength and individuation that seem entirely self-referential".[245]

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[244] Frazer, "The compassion of Zarathustra," p.67.

[245] Michaelis, "Politics," p.108, see also p.100. Henry Staten also draws attention to Nietzsche's claims about the possibility of genuine empathy with others – something that may be called "love" and which, according to Staten, Nietzsche identifies as his "greatest abyss and temptation" (*Nietzsche's voice* [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990], pp.153–55). This "pity/love" escapes some of Nietzsche's criticisms of the more common form of pity, such as the latter's superficiality and deceptiveness about its own nature and its attention to immediate suffering rather than to the potentially beneficial longer-term effects of such suffering. However, according to Staten it is still subject to other important criticisms that Nietzsche makes of pity – especially its capacity to undermine the independence and power of the strong for the benefit of the weak and suffering (p.164). Del Caro argues that Nietzsche endorses the experience of empathic love, and even advocates extending this attitude to animals (*Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric*, p.415). However, I suggest that the kind of love for others that Nietzsche describes, which, as del Caro points out, is motivated by the insight that "the human being is still unexhausted for the greatest possibilities" (BGE s.203, KSA V p.127, cited in *Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric*, p.430), does not involve a constructive sharing of the experiences of others such as I advocate. Most importantly, the love that Nietzsche describes requires hardening the self to others' pain and resisting the temptation to work with them to alleviate it or help them affirm it: on Nietzsche's account love demands leaving people to their suffering – which will either make them stronger or destroy them. Love of humanity requires allowing these things to take their course, while self-affirmation requires being hard enough to avoid being brought down by the

Michaelis' interpretation is useful, but underplays the importance of the self-referential element in Nietzsche's account, including in relation to pity. In the first place, the pity that Zarathustra feels is a sublimated kind of pity: not empathy for another's pain, but nausea and horror at the weak and miserable state of another's existence – pity for higher men is Zarathustra's ultimate seduction, not pity for sufferers.[246] This does not suggest empathy with the other, but presents witnessing the other's unhappy state as simply another form of resistance to affirmation that must be mastered and overcome. Second, the revaluation of pity that Nietzsche calls for explicitly rejects acting together with or on behalf of the other. As we saw above, he maintains that we should avoid being motivated to act by pity, and especially that we should accept that suffering means – even ought to mean – downfall for some. Overcoming pity at another's weakness requires hardness, as one refuses to redeem their pain for them by helping them avoid it or justifying it. One affirms the other insofar as he is strong, rather than humiliating him by treating him as weak and incapable: Nietzsche has Zarathustra exclaim "Woe to all lovers who cannot surmount pity!"[247] Nietzsche thinks the weak other should be allowed to live out his evaluation of life: he should be allowed to perish. This entails a certain respect for the other's autonomy, while protecting the self from being sucked into his nihilistic despair and resentful manipulations. On the other hand, it overemphasises the extent to which individuals are best left to their own devices in coming to terms with the painfulness of existence, denying the value of engaging in mutual aid in affirming life. As with his account of social conditions generally, Nietzsche emphasises the constraining effects of pity on the individual and individual escape from these constraints, instead of acknowledging the possibility of a communal reconstruction of these limits.

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sight of those who are destroyed by their suffering. Nietzsche does seem to advocate a form of empathy as part of this attitude – as he puts it, pity for the creator in human beings, who can make something beautiful and affirming of themselves, rather than for the creature who suffers (BGE s.225, KSA V p.161). But this pity for "higher men" is itself a danger, as it risks luring one either to try to make it easier for others to affirm themselves, or to feel anger and contempt for those who fail to realise this goal. For this reason Nietzsche describes this pity/love for the best in humanity as something at least largely to be resisted, as his greatest temptation and ultimate sin (Z IV Cry of distress, KSA IV pp.300–303; see also Staten, *Nietzsche's voice*, p.164).

[246] Z IV Cry of distress, KSA IV pp.300–303, see also BGE s.44, KSA V pp.60–63.

[247] Z I Compassionate, KSA IV p.115.

Nietzsche calls for turning away from the other in order to redeem one's own existence from the experience of the other's suffering. Adrian del Caro has pointed out that Zarathustra's "passing by" of the great city in "Of passing by" represents, on my interpretation, a lost opportunity to engage with and affirm the contemptible aspects of humanity. In *Grounding the Nietzsche Rhetoric of Earth*, del Caro rightly argues that it is important to Nietzsche that, in recreating oneself as a superior human being, one does not succumb to the negative affects that the sight of others can arouse: the question is "how to teach enhancement of the human type without becoming bogged down in contempt for humans".[248] Del Caro draws attention to Zarathustra's reaction to his "ape", the fool whom he encounters outside the great city, who furiously excoriates the citizens within. Zarathustra claims to be disgusted not only by the city, but also by the fool and his "contempt", and tells the fool that "Where one can no longer love, one should – *pass by*!"[249] Del Caro claims that this is because "one must keep love alive at all costs"[250] – a claim with which I can agree, as long as it is interpreted to mean that love is important, for Nietzsche, not because of its implications for interpersonal relations, but because of the effects it has on the self. That this "passing by" is oriented to avoiding the affects of anger and contempt experienced by the fool (or, potentially, other affects that worry Nietzsche, such as pity) rather than towards the citizens themselves is underscored by Zarathustra's fantasy, on the same page, of a "pillar of fire in which [the city] will be consumed!" For Nietzsche, encounters with the contemptible aspects of humanity expose one to the risk of becoming ugly and miserable. While this can provide grounds for self-overcoming, it can also be one's undoing. In this passage, Nietzsche negotiates this difficulty by advocating "passing by" where one cannot love and, relatedly, refusing to feel pity. My suggestion is that this problem is better addressed by engaging with others, even those who do not or cannot affirm themselves spontaneously, in order to improve their capacity to affirm.

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[248] Del Caro, *Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric*, pp.384–85.
[249] Z III Passing by, KSA IV, pp.224–25.
[250] Del Caro, *Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric*, p.385.

Michaelis uses the following passage to support her claim that Nietzsche requires a response to the other that incorporates empathy, but the last lines show Nietzsche to advocate an individual, self-directed response to others' suffering: "association with people imposes no mean test on my patience: my humanity does *not* consist in feeling with men how they are, but in *enduring* that I feel with them... My humanity is a constant self-overcoming. – But I need *solitude*, which is to say, recovery, return to myself, the breath of a free, light, playful air..."[251] In short, for Nietzsche pity is an unfortunate affect resulting from our social nature, which is the nature from which, as self-affirming individuals, we struggle to break free. Nietzsche's revaluation of pity does not indicate the value of others' experiences for our self-recreation, but gives an instance of the impossible movement away from inevitable entanglement with others that is embodied in the struggle for freedom and self-affirmation in general. The self-affirming individual must struggle to become independent of her conditioning by her togetherness with others, even if this is not finally possible and requires constant repetition of the attempt to break free of their constraining and levelling influence.

Nietzsche's approach to others' suffering casts the potentially enriching and productive experiences of being with others in too negative a light. I suggest that granting a positive place for the co-creation of the self with others should allow reorienting oneself towards others' pain in a way that focusses, not on the painfulness of one's own experience of pity, justifying turning away from others, but on both this feeling and the other's pain, suggesting the need to work together with the other to build a more affirming stance towards life.

7.3.2.2 Self-affirmation and the affirmation of others

Notwithstanding the opportunity to overcome nausea and pity that encountering others provides, Nietzsche sees relationships with others as basically threatening self-affirmation. He does not see these relationships as potentially enabling mutual participation in self-affirmation; in fact, the sight of ugly, weak, miserable, unoriginal people makes it hard to affirm life, while beautiful, powerful, joyful,

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[251] EH Wise s.8, KSA VI p.276.

creative figures are inspiring and make this easier.[252] However, Nietzsche does not suggest encouraging the development of the latter, but rather adjusting our attitude towards the former. He sees this as one of the hardest aspects of creating an affirmative interpretation of existence.[253] Why should we not make this task easier by promoting the development of more powerful, original, self-affirming individuals, reducing the number of depressing people we encounter and surrounding ourselves with those who help affirm life? In other words, why, if the way others are has an influence on our ability to affirm life, is Nietzsche's response to alienation not to foster a community of self-affirming individuals?

Nietzsche has several reasons not to advocate helping the weak affirm life. First, he believes that making it easier to endorse life by reducing suffering does not result in powerful, beautiful individuals, but in comfortable, content "last men".[254] This alone would not rule out encouraging others to orient themselves differently to their suffering, perhaps by being an example of someone who does so, acting as a model and incentive to others. Salim Kemal argues that Nietzsche wants just this, but that he initially limits the effects of the acts and works of great individuals to a few others. The majority of the herd, instead of being stimulated to self-creation, try to derive rules for living from the creations of genius.[255] This is the attitude espoused by Zarathustra's ape, who, instead of creating his own rule for himself, adopts Zarathustra's: the ape merely copies "something of the composition and syntax of [Zarathustra's] language".[256] However, on Kemal's account, for Nietzsche the ability to be stimulated to create one's own rules for living is universal, just not currently realised by many individuals. Everyone has the capacity for genius, and actual geniuses are those who are more determined in exercising this ability. Thus Nietzsche allows the possibility of a politics in which all members of a community stimulate each other to self-creation: "The capacity

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[252] A s.38, KSA VI pp.209–211; GM1.12, Preface s.6, KSA V pp.277–78, 252–53; Z Prologue s.5, KSA IV pp.18–21; TI Expeditions ss.37–38, KSA VI pp.136–40.
[253] GM I.12, KSA V pp.277–78; Z II Rabble, III Convalescent, KSA IV pp.124–27, 270–77.
[254] Z Prologue s.5, KSA IV pp.18–21.
[255] Salim Kemal, "Nietzsche's politics of aesthetic genius," in *Nietzsche, philosophy and the arts*, ed. Kemal, Gaskell, and Conway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.262–64.
[256] Z III Passing by, KSA IV pp.222–25.

for 'self-overcoming' that the genius possesses promotes an equality that raises everyone up through recognizing their 'virtues and rejoicing in their success'".[257]

Kemal's claim that Nietzsche potentially promotes a society of equal, self-creating geniuses is wrong for a number of reasons. Nietzsche's conception of greatness is not based on the existence of capacities for greatness in individuals but, as we have seen (6.4.3.1), on directing one's capacities to a powerful and inspiring outcome. Singlemindedness and determination in directing one's capacities just is what it is to be great; it is not a question of having a particular capacity of some sort that might be unrealised. Furthermore, Nietzsche explicitly maintains that most people are incapable of creating their own rules and ways of life, even with the examples of great individuals to follow: they will never be anything other than weak, uninteresting, and depressing to contemplate.[258]

One might ask whether, even if incapable of greatness, at least some might become less pathetic and depressing, and whether encouraging this potential could promote one's own project of self-affirmation by reducing, if not eliminating, the ugliness and misery that one has to contemplate. At least a few individuals might be stimulated by one's efforts to recreate themselves, and others might improve themselves in some limited respects. Perhaps, however, one should not make loving life easier for oneself in this way: as we have seen, Nietzsche construes overcoming hardship as important to the creation of beauty and greatness. The suffering and nausea that one experiences as a result of comprehending the mediocrity of humanity provides an opportunity for self-overcoming of the kind that Nietzsche describes in his accounts of suffering, which, as we have seen, is for Nietzsche the *sine qua non* of the affect of power.[259]

Nietzsche suggests another reason that the weak should be left as they are, giving a further argument against Kemal's egalitarian interpretation of Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche, superiority to the bulk of humanity allows the strong to

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[257] Kemal, "Nietzsche's politics", p.280; see also pp.270–71; Kemal, "Nietzsche's genealogy: Of beauty and community," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 21:3 (1990): 241.

[258] BGE s.257, KSA V pp.205–6.

[259] Adrian del Caro plausibly suggests that Nietzsche indicates that a similar refusal to eliminate hardship and obstacles from our environment should apply to our treatment of animals and nature, allowing an affirmation of a less tamed earth (*Grounding the Nietzsche rhetoric*, p.114).

unleash their dominating impulses, as the majority are reduced to tools for the realisation of their urges.[260] As Sheridan Hough points out, the "trafficking with the resentful, the malformed, the leveled, the Christian, the democratic" that Nietzsche allows provides the creative individual with her material, her means to increase her feeling of power by transforming them.[261] Nietzsche claims that the self-affirming individual "enriches everything out of [his] own abundance [...]. The man in this condition transforms things until they mirror his power – until they are reflections of his perfection."[262] Although subjecting others to one's goals does not necessarily require weak others rather than strong ones (indeed, it seems that successfully overcoming the greater resistance offered by powerful opponents would impart a greater feeling of power), this suggests that the stimulating encounter with inspiring others is less important to self-affirmation than shaping the other to one's will.

Furthermore, if supporting the development of powerful others requires restraining one's urge to dominate and overcome them – which, if these others are not independently strong enough, will be the case – the result would be similar to the levelling and stultifying democratic society that Nietzsche criticises. Nietzsche contrasts the domination of the weak by elite individuals with the demands of social moralities for the suppression of egoistic drives, particularly those of the strong, in order to support the weak. In other words, he opposes the needs of the weak and those of the strong, making the choice which of these to foster at the expense of the other. The alternatives he identifies are self-abnegation in order to allow the other to flourish, or making his desires, needs, and wellbeing irrelevant and using him as a means to realising one's own.[263]

Nietzsche's solution does not allow that one's desires and drives might be satisfied in part through the fulfillment of the desires and drives of others, or through one's contribution to this fulfillment.[264] As Stephen Houlgate points out, "The fundamental orientation of man, for Nietzsche, is towards power and

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[260] BGE s.256, KSA V pp.201–4.
[261] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, pp.126–27.
[262] TI Expeditions s.9, KSA VI pp.116–17.
[263] CW Epilogue, KSA VI pp.50–53; GS s.13, KSA III pp.384–86.
[264] CW s.2, KSA VI pp.15–16.

mastery – over oneself and others."[265] Nietzsche's use of the will to power to interpret all human motivation means not only that individuals seem essentially in competition with each other, but that they are unable to find fulfillment through affects other than that of power. The sense that one does so in certain instances only conceals the real driving force behind one's behaviour – for example, self-denial in order to enjoy another's pleasure is simply a sublimated form of self-assertion. Houlgate claims that "Nietzsche's conception of sublimation barely conceals a profound form of reductionism which is less concerned to point to the ways in which selfishness has been transformed in history, than it is to show up the 'immoral' common denominator of egoism and vanity in *all* human actions."[266] Even the charity and generosity that Nietzsche sometimes lauds treat others as a means. Great individuals may be generous and giving, but as a spontaneous expression of their desires, an outpouring of their overflowing fullness and strength, rather than as aiming to improve the lives of others. In other words, even kindness to others responds to one's own needs, rather than theirs.[267]

For Nietzsche, the individual relates externally to others, in terms of how they affect her, as tools or means or hindrances rather than genuine others.[268] Relationships are founded on competition between the urges of individuals to dominate, and others' wellbeing is irrelevant to one's own – or at least, ideally so, as one hardens oneself to their fate. Constructing a way of life that affirms the self as an individual cannot, therefore, be an enterprise in which others participate.

7.4 Social interaction

Underneath Nietzsche's rejection of empathy and socially constructed self-affirmation lie an emphasis on dominance and an associated version of an Enlightenment model of autonomy. In the first part of this section, I argue that although Nietzsche subverts in some ways the atomism and voluntarism that

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[265] Houlgate, "Power, egoism and the 'open' self in Nietzsche and Hegel," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 22 (1991): 136.

[266] Houlgate, "The 'open' self," p.124; see also p.136.

[267] BGE s.260, KSA V pp.209–210; Z I Adder's bite, I Bestowing virtue s.1, II Compassionate, KSA IV pp.87–89, 97–99, 113–16; see also Houlgate, "The 'open' self," p.126.

[268] "A human being who strives for greatness regards everybody he meets on his way either as a means or as a delay and hindrance – or as a temporary resting-place" (BGE s.273, KSA V p.227).

accompany the notion of the subject, he presents individuals as irrevocably divided from each other and unable to participate in each others' activity, with power and self-determination a zero-sum game. In the second part I show how this model informs his ideal for social relations.

7.4.1 Power, freedom, and the other

7.4.1.1 Power, passivity, activity

Nietzsche presents existence as characterised by struggle, striving, and conflict, and satisfaction and enjoyment as issuing from a feeling of increased power, that is, of overcoming resistance to impose one's will on the world. He claims, "That which is called 'freedom of will' is essentially the affect of superiority with respect to him who must obey: 'I am free, "he" must obey' – this consciousness adheres to every will".[269] As Nietzsche sees it, power is a zero-sum game, and he connects the feeling of increased power explicitly not just to overcoming resistance, but to war: "The free man is a *warrior*. – How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance which must be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft*. One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome: five steps from tyranny, near the threshold of the danger of servitude."[270]

Nietzsche complicates this claim by insisting that the affect of power is a result of missing much of what goes on when we will. Although we believe that we determine our actions in willing, in fact this belief involves identifying with a certain part of ourselves – the willing part – and corresponding exclusion from our sense of identity of another part of ourselves that obeys:

> "Freedom of will" – that is the word for that complex condition of pleasure of the person who wills, who commands and at the same time makes himself one with the executor of the command, – who as such also enjoys the triumph over resistances, but who judges it was his will itself that actually overcame these resistances. He who wills adds in this way the sensations of pleasure of the successful tools, the serviceable "under-wills" or under-souls – our body is only a social structure of many souls – to his sensations of

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[269] BGE s.19, KSA V p.32; see also A s.2, KSA VI p.170.
[270] TI Expeditions s. 38, KSA VI p.140; see also A s.2, KSA VI p.170.

> pleasure as commander. *L'effet, c'est moi*: what happens here is what happens in every well-constructed and happy commonwealth: that the ruling class identifies itself with the successes of the commonwealth.[271]

This modifies the passive-active distinction by presenting the willing self as both active and passive and passivity as a matter of co-operation or self-subordination rather than of being moved involuntarily by an external agent.

Nietzsche's notion of freedom is based on his account of self-creation as establishing rules for oneself on the basis of a dominant drive (6.4.3.1): as Ken Gemes puts it, "having free will is not a matter of being free of necessity, but rather acting from a kind of inner necessity".[272] Gemes and other commentators highlight how Nietzsche modifies traditional ideas of free will, autonomy, and agency to provide immanent and naturalistic versions of these that undermine the passive stance engendered by determinism and present activity as an accomplishment, rather than a property of a pre-existing agent.[273] Christopher Janaway characterises this as meaning that free will is a question of acting in character, rather than of free choice: "One becomes free in accepting and affirming oneself as a whole, and rather than seeing the necessity or fatedness of one's character as an inhibition or obstacle to action, one sees it as the condition of and opportunity for true self-expression".[274]

7.4.1.2 Passivity, activity, and the other

Some commentators maintain that Nietzsche's account of freedom undermines the distinctions not only between activity and passivity, but also between self and other, suggesting that free actions are shaped not only by one's own drives, but also by forces operating on the self from outside. In other words, the passive-

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[271] BGE s.19. KSA V p.33.

[272] Gemes, "Nietzsche on free will," p.45; see BGE s.208, KSA V p.137–40.

[273] Gemes, "Nietzsche on free will," p.45. As Robert Guay puts it, "Agency per se is not the rigid structure of our self-determination, but one of its products" (Guay, "Nietzsche on freedom," p.310). John Richardson concurs, arguing that Nietzsche sees freedom as a development out of an internal necessity: free spirits "are to 'incorporate' the insight that they are not first causes. [...] They accept, in particular, their fate as this lies in their constitution of *drives*" (Richardson, "Nietzschean and Kantian freedoms," *International Studies in Philosophy* 37:3 (2005): 153).

[274] Christopher Janaway, "Autonomy, affect, and the self in Nietzsche's project of genealogy," Gemes and May, *Nietzsche on freedom and autonomy*, p.62.

active distinction is undermined through receptivity and openness as well as obedience and self-mastery. Will Dudley claims that, for Nietzsche, "the soul can become tragic and free only by giving up its subjectivity, by giving up the stance from which it is always opposed by an independent and external world of objects, which it opposes with its will, informed by thought and language".[275] He expands:

> Worldly freedom, in other words, ultimately turns not on subjects willfully conforming the world to the wills they have constructed for themselves, but on subjects intermittently letting their own willfulness be overcome. The tragic soul is liberated in virtue of overcoming the distinction between herself and the world that is not-herself, the distinction between what is internal and external to her will. The tragic soul is liberated in virtue of allowing her carefully constructed will to be suspended in order to become the conduit for the emergence of intimations into language[.][276]

This romantic vision neglects the pervasiveness of Nietzsche's emphasis on dominance and his construal of the will to power as overcoming, rather than participation. Furthermore, the dependence of this model on the idea that free action is based on responding to intuitions of the other is not only unfounded by Nietzsche's texts, but contradicted by his statements about the impossibility of immediate knowledge or knowledge beyond the categories of reason.[277]

Nonetheless, Dudley is not alone in maintaining that Nietzsche views the self-affirming individual as open and receptive. Sheridan Hough claims that Nietzsche's individual is "the 'receptive', culturally created self", who is shaped by her experiences as much as she interprets them."[278] I claimed above that Nietzsche sees one's social situation as providing the framework for an appropriation of norms and a self-creation that strives to master and dominate these according to one's own organising principle (7.3.1). Hough argues, however, that the influence of social factors on our way of being is unconscious and therefore heteronomous, revealing apparent self-direction as in fact direction

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[275] Will Dudley, "Freedom in and through Nietzsche's tragic genealogy," *International Studies in Philosophy* 37:3 (2005): 139; see also p.138. Dudley's account has Nietzschean freedom developing in three stages: decadence, nobility, and tragedy (p.127).
[276] Dudley, "Freedom in Nietzsche's genealogy," p.139.
[277] BGE s.19, KSA V pp.31–34. On Nietzsche's rejection of the possibility of intuition see 9.2.2.
[278] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, p.xvi.

by social forces: "A person's vocation is itself a self-deception, a 'piece of vanity' that masks much deeper, presumably cultural, forces that are at work. The desires and intentions that compose a person's character are in fact superficial indicators of deeper desires beyond the person's conscious intentions and desires." Hough maintains that Nietzsche sees "a person's 'active' behavior [as] his or her reflective, representational behaviour",[279] meaning that unconscious social forces do not enable or constitute the free activity of the individual, but embody an extra-individual process that renders the individual passive. Thus Hough claims that for Nietzsche interpretation depends on "moments of 'grace' and inspiration", and argues that Nietzschean creativity is indebted to forces "at work in and on the artist"; that the free spirit is to "give ear to the voice of nature", and even that "will to power entails freedom and 'loss of self', not self-conscious struggle with one's deepest inclinations."[280]

Fiona Jenkins claims, similarly, that for Nietzsche "true creativity represents a *response* to life, and is not in any straightforward sense the *imposition* of meaning upon life. The creativity of the self is not expressed in an act of will which would stamp upon phenomena a subjectively valid meaning. Rather the 'willing' of the creative self is an effect of the immersion in life".[281] According to Jenkins, Nietzschean creativity requires a form of openness to experience that depends on loss of self: the free subject is "a 'persona' through whom life itself finds expression." Jenkins describes "the sense in which 'one becomes what one is' – not, as is usually assumed, in becoming the mastering agent of one's will to power, but rather as a *patient* of its forces, on the model of the ecstatic and enraptured artist," and maintains that "it is mistaken to suppose that 'becoming what one is' represents either an individualistic project or reflects an egological model of agency; it turns, rather, upon entering into a mode of subjectivity which confers receptivity to, and identification with, all that is 'other' to oneself *qua*

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[279] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, pp.139, xxv.
[280] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, pp.xvii, 147, 114–15, 43.
[281] Fiona Jenkins, "Performative identity: Nietzsche on the force of art and language," in Kemal, Gaskell, and Conway, *Nietzsche, philosophy and the arts*, p.213.

individual ego."[282] Jenkins claims that this "mode of subjectivity" is the basis for a shared aesthetic experience, as modeled in Nietzsche's early work on tragedy.

Jenkins takes the textual support for her account from *The Birth of Tragedy* and *On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense*. However, she claims, without providing support, that these tendencies continue in Nietzsche's later work which, she states, does not turn towards individualism as is usually supposed.[283] David Owen also suggests Nietzsche's model for affirmation involves dissolving subjectivity in a sense of oneness, while retaining a sense of distance as one watches this absorption in the whole.[284] Like Jenkins', Owen's account fits Nietzsche's early work better than his later work, characterising well the affirmation of existence offered by tragedy but not supporting the claim that the later Nietzsche continues to advocate absorption into a whole greater than oneself. As I have already argued (7.2), Nietzsche's later work addresses the new needs of an affirming stance towards life following the development of the individual.

7.4.1.3 Otherness and appropriation

Stephen Houlgate gives further reasons against viewing Nietzsche as demanding loss of self in receptiveness to the other. Houlgate denies that for Nietzsche "human consciousness can genuinely *let go* of itself, give up its insistence on the primacy of its own will, and respond to the matter at hand."[285] As Houlgate acknowledges, Nietzsche wants us to consider views different from our own – it is not that he is oblivious to the presence of otherness in our experience. However, he does not allow us to engage with these views on their own terms; they are always encountered as appropriated by us, as taken up and interpreted according to our schemes and means of evaluation. As Houlgate puts it, "Whatever 'problem', 'ambiguity', 'necessity', or 'otherness' Nietzsche affirms he also has to interpret, beautify, falsify or transform."[286] Houlgate's interpretation is well-supported by Nietzsche's later published works. For example, Nietzsche claims

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[282] Jenkins, "Performative identity," pp.213–14, 215, 218.
[283] Jenkins, "Performative identity," p.236.
[284] Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, pp.107–8.
[285] Houlgate, "The 'open' self," p.120.
[286] Houlgate, "The 'open' self," pp.120, 134.

that self-restraint, except in very limited form, is "the will to the *denial* of life, [...] the principle of dissolution and decay. [... L]ife itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation".[287]

Herman Siemens argues that the goal of the self-mastering individual is not to annihilate the other, but to engage in an open-ended contest with him, even where this other is weak and unhealthy.[288] According to Siemens, for Nietzsche health requires not denying sickness and suffering, but engaging with these as a continual presence which stimulates, at least if one is strong, to productive dialogue. However, while I have argued (7.3.2.1) that Nietzsche demands a sustained and affirming relationship with suffering, and indeed with suffering as an encounter with others who are weak and uninspiring, I suggest this represents, not maintaining a contestatory relationship with the other, but his incorporation, domination, and reinterpretation. For example, Nietzsche states that, while lambs fear and resent birds of prey, the latter affirm the existence of the lambs: "*we* don't dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb."[289] But this affirmation of the other is clearly not the affirmation of another individual as a genuine other, as another self, but as food, as something to be used, incorporated, and dominated.[290]

Will Dudley has argued along similar lines to Siemens, claiming that the highest form of freedom, for Nietzsche, is not an isolating self-justification of one's way of being, which results in stagnation and constraint of the self by an external other, felt as a limiting, determining presence, but an alternation between such a setting-apart-of-oneself and opening oneself to foreign influences: "freedom exists neither in sickness nor in health. Instead, it demands that one become, and feel at home in being, a perpetual cycle of self-infection and self-recuperation., of self-destruction and self-creation".[291]

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[287] BGE s.259, KSA V pp.207–8.
[288] Herman Siemens, "Nietzsche's agon with ressentiment: Towards a therapeutic reading of critical transvaluation," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34:1 (2001): 85.
[289] GM I.13, KSA V pp.278–81.
[290] I am grateful to Sonia Sikka for pointing this out.
[291] Dudley, "Freedom in Nietzsche's genealogy," p.132.

However, this is just the tension that Nietzsche identifies between pollution by external influences – our social context – and the need to create ourselves as free of these influences. The alternation of openness and closedness or sickness and health that Dudley proposes is the continual appropriation and reinterpretation of the public aspects of our experiences. It does not require constituting the other as such, respecting her autonomy, or encouraging her development. It is simply the process of interpreting, of overcoming resistances within and beyond the self, that Nietzsche claims characterises all life as will to power and the freely self-creating individual in particular in her attempt at liberation.[292]

Nietzsche values otherness, but as something interpreted, appropriated, shaped, and made part of the self – as something to be overcome. As Houlgate states, "There are moments in Nietzsche's texts which suggest that he might understand what genuine openness is, but they are invariably subsumed under the overwhelming rhetoric of will and creativity."[293] Incorporation and interpretation are not, for Nietzsche, ways of respecting the otherness of the other but means of furthering one's will and being creative in the face of resistance from that other. In other words, while Nietzsche complicates the notion of agency by representing willing as complex, opaque, and conflictual, the result is a model of action and interpretation as requiring, not openness to the other and breaking down boundaries, but order, rank, and submission as well as mastery.

Nietzsche's model of freedom and power has these as a zero-sum game between entities which encounter each other in terms of resistance and seek to dominate each other. The interactions of drives within the self, like those between

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[292] John Smith, like Dudley and Siemens, argues that the encounter with otherness is for Nietzsche a question of openness: "the will to power is not striving to 'cleanse' itself of otherness, or to discover some state of ideal identity with all others [...]. Rather, the will [...] as *affect*, passion, and feeling is to be judged on the basis of its 'health.' And yet, this 'health' needs to be conceived not as the opposite of Kantian heteronomous pathology but, rather in the light of the *große Gesundheit* of which Nietzsche speaks in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*: namely, the ability to take in and deal with difference within the self. The 'great health' is not associated with the closed body maintaining itself in a struggle against others but, on the contrary, with an insatiable openness to that which is beyond recognition" (John Smith, "Nietzsche's 'will to power': Politics beyond (Hegelian) recognition," *New German Critique* 77 [1998]: 152; see also p.153). However, this in fact supports the interpretation I have just offered: openness to the other as Nietzsche sees it means overcoming and incorporating the other, rather than recognition of otherness as such.

[293] Houlgate, "The 'open' self," p.120.

individual persons, are struggles of each striving to get what they want against the efforts of the others, who may eventually submit. Social interactions are conflicts between the desires, instincts, and wills of separate individuals, while within the self competition for dominance goes on between drives, with the losers submitting to the winners, taking place largely beneath the level of conscious experience that we tend to think of as in the driving seat. In other words, although individuals do not control their actions in the way they imagine – in conscious decisions –, their interactions with each other, like those between the various urges and tendencies that comprise them, still aim at domination. Despite subverting the dichotomies between activity and passivity and free will and determinism, Nietzsche retains the ideas that freedom is escape from having one's actions and beliefs conditioned by others, and that power is a kind of autonomy, albeit not the autonomy of consciousness but that of any of the wills that struggle to determine themselves and others, or of the self as a whole against competing others.

7.4.2 Friends, neighbours, and tyranny

In 7.3 I argued that Nietzsche rejects the possibility of a community of individuals engaged in fostering mutual self-affirmation. Here, I suggest he sees stimulating interactions with other self-affirming individuals as valuable, but as elusive and transient. Nietzsche acknowledges the unfulfilling, even depressing nature of a life alienated from others, and his ideal for social relations suggests the desire for relationships with other self-affirming individuals.[294] However, he presents these relationships as frustrating, alienating, occurring only accidentally, and usually transitory. Consequently, they cannot be the basis for self-affirmation, but only a potential or occasional alleviation of the isolation to which the self-affirming individual must accustom herself and, indeed, endorse. I suggest that Nietzsche's privileging of the urge to dominate precludes a central place in his account of self-affirmation for participatory and cooperative engagement with others.

Nietzsche suggests that the ideal relationship between human beings is agonistic engagement, which he sometimes calls "friendship". It is a kind of

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[294] GS s.14, KSA III pp.386–87, Z Prologue 1, I Friend, KSA IV pp.11–12, 71–73 .

friendship, however, premised on conflict, and which he therefore associates with war and "enmity".[295] Friends are self-affirming individuals, each of whom creates her world and way of being and tries to project that interpretation and practice onto others.[296] Since each party in a friendship creates her own interpretation, but recognises in the other an equal and someone against whom it is worthwhile to struggle, each must affirm her own system, while recognising the existence of another, rival system that she seeks to supplant. Thus friendship requires respect for the other that induces one not to hold back in one's own expression of power, trusting him to resist one's onslaught. The rewards of friendship are mutual recognition with an equal and reciprocal granting and receiving of power from the give-and-take of resistance and overcoming that characterises the struggle.[297]

Friendship can only exist between individuals who are near-equals; in the case of a power difference, one party will overcome the other and, instead of friendship, the relationship will be of domination and submission.[298] Sustaining friendship thus depends on a stalemate in the struggle to impose interpretations and desires on the other. Agreement on which interpretation is better turns the friendship into a situation of dominator and dominated, and even accepting them as equal ends the agonistic interaction characteristic of friendship in a stable situation like that of the comfort-seeking, uninspiring neighbours or last men.

Insofar as their equilibrium is a fragile one formed by constant struggle, friendships are thus not only dynamic, but also rare and transient. Furthermore, not everyone is capable of friendship. Friendship relies on the independent creativity of the friends, and therefore on disagreement and conflict, whereas according to Nietzsche human beings tend to want their worldview, morals, and way of life to be endorsed and shared by others.[299] Nor does Nietzsche think

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[295] Z I Friend, KSA IV pp.71–73.

[296] Z I Creator, KSA IV pp.80–83.

[297] Z I Chastity, KSA IV pp.69–70, I Friend, KSA IV pp.71–73. I suggest in 11.4 that engagement with another way of being in tension with one's own may also stimulate to recreate oneself and reinterpret one's experiences, although Nietzsche takes up this implication only in a limited way.

[298] BGE s.259, KSA V pp.207–8.

[299] Z I Love of one's neighbour, KSA IV pp.77–79. Robert Miner argues that in addition to being possible only between certain types of "higher" individuals, friendship is difficult even for the latter because it requires maintaining a delicate equilibrium between several opposing qualities ("Nietzsche on friendship," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 [2010]: 53).

everyone can create themselves by developing their own ruling idea to unify their drives in the first place; most prefer to subject themselves to the ruling idea of another. In the resulting system of social relations, great individuals impose their will on a majority, dominating and using them for their purposes.[300] At times, this seems to be Nietzsche's desideratum for social relationships, perhaps necessary for the emergence of great individuals. But at other times he expresses longing for the agonistic interaction of equals – for example, it is friendship, not domination, that he has Zarathustra call for as the ideal relationship.[301] While domination allows the indulgence of one's drives without self-restraint in consideration for others, Nietzsche recognises that the tyrant lives a lonely existence alienated from her subjects. His ideal of friendship expresses longing to encounter and engage with others in a more authentic sense, and even a desire for recognition, although on different terms from that of the neighbour – that is, not the acceptance of another who reassures one that one is "good" or "right" or safe, but the recognition of an enemy whom one respects.

Nietzsche's response to the tension between the desires for engagement with equals and for domination reveals how his zero-sum account of power and alienating construction of social interaction leaves his self-affirming individual not just isolated, but experiencing this isolation as painful. The recognition that social relations are characterised by dynamism, conflict, and risk of oppression is insightful and valuable, but also an incomplete and alienating picture. As an ideal for social relations, Nietzsche's model of friendship is more a source of longing and dissatisfaction than of fulfillment and affirmation. Almost everyone – if not actually everyone – one meets falls short of the standard for a friend, and even those who become friends for a while are likely to be eventually found wanting.

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[300] Z I Creator, KSA IV pp.80–83; BGE s.257, KSA V pp.205–6.

[301] Z I Chastity, I Creator, KSA IV pp.69–70, 80–83. Ruth Abbey argues that this tension between friendship and dominance reflects a development from Nietzsche's middle period, in which he gives a positive account of friendship, to his later works, which stress individualism and dominance and reject friendship as a goal. Abbey views *Zarathustra* as a transitional text in this respect, retaining elements of the earlier, sympathetic view of friendship which disappear in his later works ("Circles, ladders, and stars: Nietzsche on friendship," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2:4 (1999): 50–73). I agree with much of Abbey's argument, but claim that Nietzsche's value for friendship remains in his later work (see, for example, BGE 260, KSA V p.211), although, as I argue just below, not as central to self-affirmation.

Either you overcome them and force them to submit to your evaluations, or it is they who are stronger and finally subject you to their will. The impossibility of genuine communication and the zero-sum nature of self-realisation, as Nietzsche sees it, entails that self-affirmation cannot be based on one's interaction with other human beings, but must be carried out by the individual: by a new kind of individual, who is hard enough to reject the lure of pity for and recognition by others and endorse the painful isolation of her existence.

7.4.3 Social relations in the agon

7.4.3.1 Agonism and democracy

Various commentators have attempted to interpret Nietzsche's political thought along more inclusive and fulfilling lines, arguing that he demands a dialogical, contestatory, or even communal construction of worldviews and practices. Some have presented this in democratic terms, maintaining that all members of a community can at least potentially participate in such a creative, agonistic relationship. For example, Alan Schrift defends the compatibility of Nietzsche's anxiety about the levelling effects of the herd with democratic values, pointing out the commonality of Nietzsche's concerns with many of democracy's most famous advocates.[302] I argue, however, that the moments in Nietzsche's text that suggest a more inclusive and democratic slant are overwhelmed by his emphasis on competition, isolation, and the idea of power as a zero-sum game. This makes reconstructing Nietzsche's political thought as radically democratic incompatible with some of his central claims. Any such reconstruction should thus be undertaken, not under the guise of interpreting Nietzsche, but explicitly as a further development of his thought along new lines.[303]

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[302] Alan Schrift, "Nietzschean agonism and the subject of radical democracy," *Philosophy Today* 45: Supplement (2001): p.158; see also Maudemarie Clark, "Nietzsche's antidemocratic rhetoric," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37: supplement (1999): 119–41; Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean defence of democracy* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995). Adrian del Caro, on the other hand, argues (as I do) that Nietzsche is distinguished from romantics like Novalis by his rejection of dialogue and democracy (Adrian del Caro, *Nietzsche contra Nietzsche: Creativity and the anti-romantic* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 198]), pp.169–72).

[303] As Conway and Brown also note (Conway, "Thus spoke Rorty," p.104; Wendy Brown, "Nietzsche for politics," in *Why Nietzsche still? Reflections on drama, culture, and politics*, ed. Alan D. Schrift [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], p.219).

I described above (7.3.2.2) Salim Kemal's claim that Nietzsche sees the aesthetic practices of geniuses as providing examples to stimulate others to acts of self-creation. The result is a community of creators developing provisional rules for their actions which they do not impose on others or establish for all time, but use to incite others to further acts of creativity.[304] This presents Nietzschean social relations as based on dialogue, although a dialogue that takes place primarily not in criticism or rational, articulated discussion of ideas, but through embodied practice, as individuals take up (or do not take up) the possibilities given them by others. As I argued above, however, Kemal's extension to all individuals of the ability to take up these possibilities is not consistent with Nietzsche's explicit claims about the inadequacy of most people to this task, nor with his account of the will to power as a zero-sum game. Nietzsche does not view the self-realisation of the other entirely positively, as a stimulus to one's own self-creation, but also as a limitation that one struggles to escape. For the great, other great individuals may be a joy and an inspiration, even a worthy enemy, but for most people they are tyrants. The ways of life of others are, for Nietzsche, constraints to be escaped as much as enabling conditions. This is the case even in the encounter between great individuals, who, even when they meet as friends, must resist each other's attempts to dominate one another. Thus, although Kemal picks up on a positive moment in Nietzsche's political thought – the possibility of inspiration by great individuals – and uses it to inform a model of a kind of radical democracy, he puts the agonistic encounter between individuals in terms that do not fit Nietzsche's diagnosis of the generally constricting and violent nature of human interaction.

David Owen, Alan Schrift, and Herman Siemens have also interpreted Nietzsche's agonistic ideal for community along democratic lines. As Owen notes, Nietzsche's perspectivism entails an agonistic culture, since disagreements must be decided through contest, rather than by reference to an external standard of truth.[305] However, this does not mean that such a culture is sustainable, generalisable, or can be deliberately cultivated. As Owen also notes, and as I

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[304] Kemal, "Nietzsche's genealogy," p.244; see also Kemal, "Nietzsche's politics of aesthetic genius," pp.263, 270–71, 277.
[305] Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, p.146.

argued in the last section, the emergence of a pre-eminent individual or genius threatens the contest, resulting in tyranny. There is also an opposite risk: that the contest will stagnate and dissolve into a static, non-agonistic situation of neighbourliness. Owen maintains that Nietzsche thinks individuals must sustain an agonistic culture in order to become great, since the ability to create oneself as a self-affirming individual depends on a public context that promotes self-development.[306] Self-mastery, Owen claims, requires that interpretations and ways of mastering the self be tested against each other to determine the best way of ordering the soul. This process requires public justification: "it is in the arena of politics that we are concerned with the character of nobility in arguing about which virtues and values should be communally cultivated."[307]

Owen's account is based mainly on Nietzsche's early text "Homer on Competition", and it is not clear how far he takes it to apply to the later Nietzsche. One major difference is that the later Nietzsche is not concerned with identifying virtues and values to be cultivated by a community, but rather with which should be developed by particular individuals. He often claims that different virtues and values are appropriate to different individuals, and that there is no answer to which should be fostered overall. For example, his question "how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength[?]" reflects a contrast of the personal attention to one's own needs that he advocates with universal goals.[308] The claim that Nietzsche gives an overriding goal of fostering debate and conflict is also not supported by the later texts, but the reference to perspectivism in the following quote suggests that Owen thinks it is: Nietzsche's "political theory models a non-liberal conception of citizens as free and equal, and exhibits its commitment to pluralism by ruling out as unreasonable any demand to impose a given doctrine on others on the grounds that such a demand is based on the contradictory idea of a non-perspectival perspective and would abrogate the freedom and equality of citizens."[309] While Nietzsche's denial of objective truth

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[306] Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, p.139.
[307] Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, p.160.
[308] EH Clever s.1, KSA VI p.279.
[309] Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, p.162.

or value avoids pre-emptively foreclosing debate about how the world is or how one should act, it also rules out establishing a supreme value of conflict or debate. His commitment to pluralism does not entail an obligation to keep options open for others. Rather, as I have described, Nietzsche thinks great individuals strive to impose their will on others, not to encourage them to develop their capacities. Finally, we have seen that Nietzsche is not only not committed to equality, but explicitly argues against it either as a fact or as a value we should strive to realise.

Like Owen, Alan Schrift claims that Nietzsche's agonism commits him to requiring great individuals to establish a space for public debate in which others can participate: according to Schrift, Nietzsche "acknowledged that in order to preserve freedom from dominance, one must be committed to maintaining the institution of the *agon* as a shared public space for open competition."[310] Schrift claims that this is possible through the interaction of several geniuses, inciting each other to further "meritorious action" while preventing each other from devolving into tyrants. The stimulus of this contest is necessary to prevent individuals from settling down, resting on their laurels, and failing to develop.

As we have seen, Nietzsche indeed claims that adversity and enmity are useful spurs to development and greatness, and, as Schrift points out, that enemies are good to have.[311] However, this entails neither that one must or can encourage others to become such adversaries, nor that one needs to encounter other great individuals in order to become great oneself. While Nietzsche sees the feeling of overcoming resistance as central to the affect of power, there are plenty of sources of such resistance without the opposition of worthy enemies. Suffering, pain, and obstruction are encountered in the non-human world, in attempting to subject multitudes of weak individuals to one's will, or in the conflicts and contradictions within oneself. Nietzsche also does not give a reason for holding, like Schrift, that we should "preserve freedom from dominance". In fact, as I have mentioned, he indicates that dominance may be integral to the development of great, inspiring,

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[310] Schrift, "Nietzschean agonism," p.157; see also p.161.
[311] TI Antinature s.3, KSA VI pp.84–85.

and powerful individuals, and that dominance and exploitation are fundamental characteristics of life that it is damaging, not to mention futile, to try to avoid.[312]

Herman Siemens has also claimed that for Nietzsche, the development of one's capacities is stimulated by others, and therefore "the interests of ascending life [...] require the *empowerment* of the antagonist, for the sake of continued conflict and growth." According to Siemens, "Nietzsche's philosophy must therefore resist the lure of finality and the expedient of destroying its opponents. This does not exclude conflict altogether. The interests of 'growing, struggling life' require that Nietzsche's philosophy *practice conflict or struggle* in a form that (a) *empowers* its opponents, and (b) remains *open-ended or inconclusive*".[313] However, Siemens recognises that Nietzsche's account of the will to power does not allow the self-affirming individual to restrain her urge to dominate in order to give the other space to grow powerful enough to oppose her. Thus, unlike Owen and Schrift, Siemens does not maintain that Nietzsche demands commitment to creating the conditions for agonism. Rather, he suggests, agonism is or can be self-sustaining. According to Siemens, on Nietzsche's model the dynamic inherent to the agon limits the power of any given individual: "any bids for power, any attempts at closure are checked or undone by the vicissitudes of empowerment-disempowerment to which they are subject."[314]

This claim seems not only unwarranted by Nietzsche's texts, which admit the possibility of tyranny and oppression, but also a bad description of power relations in general. It is true that the power of any individual is limited by the sheer weight of social structures, culture, history, tradition, and the numbers of other individuals with different viewpoints, and, as I have argued, Nietzsche recognises this. But this does not at all entail that these limits will restrain powerful individuals sufficiently to empower other individuals; nor does it suggest that, even granted this space, others will take up the opportunity to empower themselves. If this were the case, we would not expect tyranny, abuse, and massive imbalances of power to be risks of an agonistic society, and

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[312] BGE s.259, KSA V pp.207–8.
[313] Siemens, "Nietzsche's agon with ressentiment," p.79.
[314] Siemens, "Nietzsche's agon with ressentiment," p.80.

Nietzsche clearly views the agon as a place inherently circumscribed by such dangers. In short, Nietzsche's politics do not provide a mechanism for establishing relations of friendship but, as I concluded in the last section, leave it up to chance whether one encounters others who are worthy of being one's enemies, and accept that most people will not live up to this standard and that friendship relations will therefore be rare, unstable, and transient.

7.4.3.2 Self-limitation as invitation to dialogue

Siemens does suggest one strategy for empowering others, and hence fostering the emergence of an agonistic culture, that fits Nietzsche's text. Siemens points out that, for Nietzsche, rhetorical strategies of irony, self-awareness, and paradox can invite and stimulate critique, provoking and attacking opponents without negating their position, and thereby acting as a strategy of self-limitation. According to Siemens, "'saying and unsaying' constitutes a coherent practice of limited aggression."[315] Siemens is right that Nietzsche often undermines the status of his own text as true, claiming there is no such thing as universal truth, demanding his followers create their own systems of values rather than aping his, and reminding his readers of the subjectivity and individuality of any interpretations or systems of valuation, including his own.[316]

This highlights the tension in Nietzsche's goal for the self-affirming individual that I have been investigating. On the one hand, on Nietzsche's model promoting one's power entails attempting to dominate, exploit, and appropriate the other, treating him as an object. On the other hand, Nietzsche sometimes expresses the desire to encounter others who are genuine subjects, who can withstand this expression and provide companionship and recognition in the context of an agonistic political structure. His texts contain moments of invitation, self-limitation, and other-directedness as attempts to encourage others to express themselves, withstand the speaker, and create their own visions for living and

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[315] Siemens, "Nietzsche's agon with ressentiment," p.82.
[316] E.g., Nietzsche follows claims that the world is will to power and everything is interpretation with the statement "Granted that this too is only interpretation – and you are becoming assiduous enough to make this objection? – well, all the better" (BGE s.22, KSA V p.37).

ways of mastering themselves. These moments are picked up by commentators seeking to democratise Nietzsche. However, they conflict with Nietzsche's demands for self-determination and overcoming resistances in order to experience oneself as powerful. In other words, as I argued above, these moments are not required for the self-affirmation of the individual that Nietzsche endorses, and risk undermining it. One's self-limitation in unsaying what one says while one says it can be self-directed, reminding one to continually revise one's interpretations, but can also, as Siemens suggests, contribute to the empowerment of the other. Where it does the latter, however, it undermines one's self-realisation rather than fosters it, owing to the zero-sum nature of power relations as Nietzsche sees them. The encounter with others whom one can recognise as equals and against whom one can test and develop one's capacities is not a necessity for the self-overcoming that Nietzsche views as central to an affirmative stance towards existence, but a separate need or desire for companionship. As such, it has its roots in the herd morality and social way of being that Nietzsche views as a constraint on the individual and a hindrance to self-affirmation. While the relationship of friendship is different from that of neighbours, aiming not for consensus but for difference, and not for reassurance but for inspiration and incitement to self-improvement, nonetheless if one is unable to affirm oneself without it then one is not an independently powerful individual after all, but still a part of the herd.

Nietzsche's text contains hints of the desirability of a communal construction of meaning and ways of being, as one might surmise from the proliferation of accounts that interpret his work in this way. He evidently longs for companionship and dialogue, and recognises the inextricability of our thoughts and actions from social life. However, his insistence on the competitive nature of the will to power, and on the damaging (even if also necessary) nature of social constraints for the ability to affirm life, means that a democratic or liberal interpretation of his work marks a definite departure from his thought.

Chapter 8 Myth II: Scepticism and myth

8.1 Introduction

Nietzsche sometimes uses the term "myth" to describe his proposed creative, self-affirming new interpretations of experience.[317] As constructions that use fictional entities and structures to explain otherwise chaotic, meaningless, and frightening processes, these interpretations function like myths to make sense of experience. According to Nietzsche, new interpretations should be many and varied, not just created on an individual basis but also explicitly recognised as such and therefore as provisional and partial accounts.[318] Unlike the myths of the Greeks or Christians or scientists these are therefore myths that are known to be myths.

This shifts the nature of affirming life from capturing truth, meaning, and goodness in one's worldview and expressing these in one's actions to a process of interpreting, questioning, and experimenting. The results do not gain power or plausibility from reference to anything transcending experience, and foster richness and variety in ways of being. The idea is that, by recognising interpretations and ways of being as mythical constructions, Nietzsche allows them to be successively taken up, altered, and destroyed in order to affirm oneself as fully as possible. However, I argue that the self-consciously mythical status of the interpretations that Nietzsche demands has implications that support the conclusions of my last two chapters: that the affirmation that Nietzsche calls for is an endorsement of alienation, rather than an escape from it; and that it presents creative dialogue with others as both longed for and out of reach.

8.2 Communal myths

8.2.1 Myth, religion, and science

Nietzsche's critiques of Christianity and reason present the worldviews of these institutions as myths whose status as such has been obscured. Their explanations

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[317] E.g., BGE s.21, KSA V pp.35–36. At other times, as I have, he refers to "interpretations" and "perspectives": e.g., *Interpretation* (BGE s.22, KSA V p.37), *Auslegung* (BGE s.14, KSA V p.28), *Ausdeutung* (BGE s.20, KSA V p.34 *Ausblick* (BGE s.257, KSA V p.205).
[318] Z II Self-overcoming, III Law-tables s.2, KSA IV pp.146–49, 246–48; GS s.295, KSA III pp.535–36.

of the self, the world, suffering, and right action are structures and narratives that human beings created to make sense of an incoherent and frightening existence. The purported demythologisation of the world with the rise of science was, for Nietzsche, rather a remythologisation, as the mythical structures of God, the soul, the cosmos, and the ideal of eternal life were substituted for by equally mythical structures of objective truth, the subject, the thing in itself, and an ideal of progress towards a better life on earth. These performed the same functions as the former, were created in the same way – by human interpretive activity –, and were similarly, erroneously, thought to be objective accounts of reality. In other words, they were myths whose mythical nature was forgotten.

I have already explained the damaging consequences that Nietzsche sees of the facts that these myths were constructed communally and taken to be objective, as well as of the specific categories that the Christian and rational myths in particular employed in their structuring of experience (6.2, 6.4.1, 7.3.2.1). Perhaps worst for Nietzsche was their denial or obfuscation of the intrinsically painful and destructive nature of existence, which they sought to conceal, change, or redeem. For Nietzsche, it is the task of interpretation to make experiences manageable and coherent, so that we may survive, flourish, and realise the urges and capacities that comprise us as living beings. This requires the creation of myths that foster an affirmative stance towards these experiences; otherwise, we are impelled to despair and self-annihilation. However, the unavoidable intrusion into experience of meaningless suffering as well as destruction and violence – including our own drives to these things – means that this affirmation has to incorporate, and not merely deny, the nature of life as painful, transient, and opaque.

8.2.2 Myth and the Greeks

As I described in chapter 6, the early Nietzsche thought that societies, as well as individuals, could affirm life while acknowledging suffering and cruelty (6.3, see 10.6.1). He saw the transfiguration of the terrors of existence into something beautiful and desirable as characteristic of the Greek way of life, expressed not only in Greek art, including its tragic plays, but also in its culture, customs, myths,

and religion.[319] However, while it recognises and affirms the terrors of existence, Greek myth is not a model for the self-affirmation that the later Nietzsche wants. As I argued in chapters 6 and 7, these myths are based on a two-world account of experience that Nietzsche later repudiates, and their communal nature makes them unsuitable for the modern individual. Furthermore, the Greeks saw their myths as true accounts of things, and their moral strictures and customs as giving objective guidance. Thus for Nietzsche these would be for modern individuals, like those of Christianity and science, restrictive and stifling. What the later Nietzsche thinks we need in order to affirm life are individual myths which – while accepted as "true" insofar as we base our way of life on them, at least provisionally – are known to be myths, and which thus permit and even encourage change.

8.3 Myth and the modern individual

8.3.1 Affirmation through creative interpretation

The later Nietzsche's approach to endorsing experience has important continuities with his earlier account of myth. The creation of aesthetically pleasing interpretations is still the means by which one pulls experiences into a coherent whole in defiance of dispersing, creative-destructive processes. However, although the results are relatively stable, coherent worldviews and constructions of the self, these are understood not to reflect a separate reality underlying them, and so can be destroyed and replaced by new forms. Like the worldviews of the Christians, the Greeks, and Enlightenment science, these new shapes and figures are mythical constructions created to make sense of ourselves and the world; but unlike these other worldviews, the latter are explicitly understood to be myths.

The later Nietzsche's shifts towards immanence and the individual are thus associated with a third shift, in the conditions for making sense of and taking joy in one's existence. He changes these from understanding the way things "really are" to creating one's self and world. The forms of the myths with which one

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[319] The Greek gods, like tragedy, exemplify the transfiguring effect of myth. The gods represent an Apollonian ordering of a terrible reality, allowing the Greeks to assent enthusiastically to life while recognising its monstrousness: "The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to place between himself and life the radiant dreambirth of the Olympians" (BT s.3, KSA I p.36; see also BT s.5, KSA I pp.42–48).

configures and negotiates experiences are less important than the activity of self-affirming creativity itself. In other words, the focus of interpretation moves from an external world to the self: the point is to fulfill one's drives to create and dominate, rather than to understand and respond to something outside oneself.

For Nietzsche, the price of clarity, stability, and apparent objectivity is stultification, alienation, and eventual self-destruction. Clarity and stability are premised on the lie of epistemological access to a metaphysical reality. This implies that the approach that best escapes these problems is not completely clear, comprehensible, or amenable to a single, correct interpretation. The most fruitful account should point up its own incompleteness and call for revision and contestation. Inconsistencies, ironies, self-refutations, and gaps are not only allowed but encouraged. Nietzsche praises rhetoric, contradiction, and ambiguity, and it has been suggested that the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and self-refutations in his own writings exemplify this decision to avoid giving a false impression of objectivity.[320] However, one question resulting from this ironic stance towards one's own claims is the extent to which it conflicts with the need for conviction in a stable worldview in order to function, increase one's power, and affirm oneself.

8.3.2 Irony and alienation
The new, individual myths that Nietzsche advocates are to be adopted on a provisional basis, rather than seen as reflections of reality. The appropriate attitude towards them is, therefore, ironic and playful. One might ask, however, whether this is not a recipe for a more profound and inescapable alienation. The

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[320] TI Morality s.3, KSA VI pp.84–85; Babette Babich, "Nietzsche and the philosophy of scientific power: Will to power as constructive interpretation," *International Studies in Philosophy* 22 (1990): 83; Blondel, "Nietzsche: Life as metaphor"; Bernd Magnus, Stanley Stewart, and Jean-Pierre Mileur. *Nietzsche's case: Philosophy as/and literature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.16ff; Paul de Man, "Nietzsche's theory of rhetoric," *Symposium* 28:1 (1974): 43; Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, p.5; Alexander Nehamas, *Life as literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.33–39; Bernard Reginster, "Perspectivism, criticism and freedom of spirit," *European Journal of Philosophy* 8 (2002): 55; Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche and the question of interpretation: Between hermeneutics and deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.142–43; Linda Williams, "On making Nietzsche consistent," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 31 (1993): 128; Ken Gemes argues, however, that using rhetoric to persuade, particularly if one admits to it, "invites dismissal" ("Nietzsche's critique of truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 [1992]: 48).

self is always an actor, always at a critical remove from its beliefs and actions, continually tearing apart what seems closest to it.[321] It knows that the world it encounters, including itself, are make-believe, and should be at some point destroyed and replaced by something else. This seems a horrifying, frightening state of affairs: no wonder Nietzsche thinks that even the strongest and hardest individuals must change to be able to affirm life while recognising this situation.

Sheridan Hough has described this state of alienation as a tension between two dimensions that belong to the free spirit: "constant self-overcoming" and "the moments in which an individual is actually able to embrace him- or herself and accept all that he or she is." Hough claims "these attitudes, in their very constitution, are opposed to one another."[322] An ironic, provisional stance towards oneself and one's world precludes wholehearted affirmation of these. While the free spirit craves wholeness, as Hough puts it he is "necessarily a divided soul, staking claims that he is ultimately compelled to call into question."[323] Any self-affirmation is brief, transient, and counter to self-overcoming. Similarly, P. Patton identifies "a common underlying difficulty facing modern individuals: that of being aware of the arbitrary character of the roles that one has assumed, and of the contingency of the fact that one has assumed these roles, but no less committed to some of them despite that awareness."[324] And R. Lanier Anderson asks, in relation to Nietzsche's own doctrine of the will to power, "How could a world-picture *succeed* in expressing one's values, if one did not *believe* it [? ....] Nietzsche himself points out that such world-views must be believed to be effective".[325] In other words, fully appropriating and endorsing existence as one encounters it requires epistemological commitment to this experience, and the ironic, playful, and self-questioning stance Nietzsche advocates makes this impossible.

Nietzsche's response to alienation relies on changing the kind of alienation we experience, as well as our attitude towards it, rather than dissolving it entirely.

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[321] GS s.125, KSA III pp.480–81; Z II Self-overcoming, III Law-tables s.2, KSA IV pp.146–49, 246–48.
[322] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, pp.100–101.
[323] Hough, *Nietzsche's noontide friend*, p.100, also p.137.
[324] P. Patton, "Nietzsche and the problem of the actor," in Schrift, *Why Nietzsche still?* pp.181–82.
[325] R. Lanier Anderson, "Overcoming charity," *Nietzsche-Studien* 25 (1996): 335; see BGE s.9, KSA V p.21–22.

He believes that appropriating myths in an ironic and playful way retrieves our drives and desires from the alienation we feel towards them as a result of conforming to supposedly objective accounts that demand we be a certain way. Recognising that the myths through which one encounters the world and the self are never full expressions of the richness and diversity of experience allows the individual to construct these as changing constellations of drives and needs, over time expressing and endorsing a larger number of them than on a supposedly objective account. It also allows them to be incorporated as they spontaneously express themselves, rather than after sublimation through reference to moral demands. The individual does not need to repudiate or suppress parts of herself in light of an external ideal (see 6.4.3.1).

However, this also means that any of the ways that one exists are inessential to one's self. What we experience as the self is an aggregate formed contingently from conflicting, transient urges and processes that fall into temporary alignment in their quest to dominate each other. Self-affirmation requires endorsing these drives and their confluence in an apparently unitary self without identifying with them; in other words, it is an affirmation of an alienated and fragmented self.

8.3.3 Myth and community

Nietzsche's call for ironic, self-consciously incomplete constructions of reality has a number of beneficial effects, including avoiding dogmatism, permitting diversity, tolerance of different viewpoints, and openness to new experiences. However, as I have argued (7.4), these benefits are realised in only a limited way by Nietzsche. The notion that one's myths should be deliberately, self-consciously partial seems amenable to inclusion in a dialogical model of myth-creation, in which one invites others to engage with and modify one's interpretations. Such an engagement could emerge in an agonistic context, as conflict over competing views finds footholds in inconsistencies and takes off in fruitful directions from paradoxes and weaknesses. However, as I argued above, although Nietzsche sometimes invites others to critically engage with his work, he does not seem to

expect this to bear fruit often.[326] We have seen how fragile, transient, and rare relations of friendship are on Nietzsche's account, and that he does not advocate deliberately fostering productive relations with others. Adrian del Caro contrasts Nietzsche's ambivalence on this issue to the early German romantic invitation to others to participate in creating: Nietzsche "wanted to involve [his readers], as did the romanticist, but the nature of this involvement was not as generous", and "Nietzsche had no such respect [as did the romantics] for readers in general. He did not wish to invite them into his thoughts, or his creative process. This is why Heinrich von Ofterdingen listens so often, while Zarathustra preaches".[327] Magnus, Stewart, and Mileur go so far as to argue that Nietzsche's apparent invitations to readers to involve themselves in dialogue with him undermine their interpretations of his text and are thus in fact part of a strategy for rejecting his audience: "Zarathustra turns his back on the readers he has seduced in order to enjoy the solipsistic pleasures of authorship [.... T]he figure of the writer ultimately represents, from this perspective, a radical and destructive break with the pastoral tradition and with the writer's traditional responsibility to others".[328] Creating the conditions for inclusive, dialogical, communal constructions of myth conflicts, on Nietzsche's zero-sum model of power, with the domination of the other and overcoming of the resistance he offers that is necessary for the increase in one's feeling of power, and consequently for self-affirmation.

While fruitful dialogue with others and confrontation with myths that differ from one's own is desirable and stimulating, it is not necessary for embarking on the project of continually recreating worldviews and ways of being. Nietzsche's call for the continual revision of viewpoints, the tearing apart of myths and structures for understanding the world, applies primarily to the relation of the individual to her own myths and constructions of reality, and does not require the establishment of a community of creative individuals in dialogue.

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[326] EH Preface s.4, KSA VI pp.259–61; GM Preface ss.7–8, KSA V pp.254–56; Z I Reading and writing, I War and warriors, III Passing by, KSA IV pp.48–50, 58–60, 222–25.
[327] Del Caro, *Nietzsche contra Nietzsche*, pp.184, 186.
[328] Magnus, Stewart, and Mileur, *Nietzsche's case*, p.179.

Chapter 9 Affirmation and immanence II

9.1 Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that an immanent affirmation of existence would have the following characteristics: it would not rely on anything beyond human experience, for example a transcendent God or an unknowable thing in itself, either as a metaphysical background to appearances or as a means of granting value to life, and would give a monistic account of existence, situating human beings within their world and making clear how they can both observe and interact with their surroundings. As an attempt to affirm life it should also either overcome, or suggest a means of coping with, the experiences of alienation, death and suffering that make affirming life difficult.

The later Nietzsche explicitly aims to provide a means of affirming life that is completely immanent, and his work can perhaps even be seen as defining this project as a task for modernity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate all the questions relating to the success of Nietzsche's attempt at an immanent affirmation, and this chapter provides only summaries of some important points relating to these themes. The last part of the chapter summarises what I take to be the most valuable contributions of Nietzsche's model for an immanent affirmation, and what I take to be his greatest weakness: his dismissal of the possibility of authentic interactions with others as a basis for self-affirmation.

9.2 Metaphysics, epistemology, and immanence

9.2.1 Perspectivism

In chapter 6 I described Nietzsche's move from a two-world model of appearance and reality to a one-world model in which nothing exists except various forms of experience. The latter are shaped by the interpretations of those who experience them, and hence can potentially exist in multiple ways. Furthermore, the later Nietzsche understands those who "have" these experiences on an immanent, perspectival basis as well: that is, the latter are not fundamentally subjects, or indeed substances of any sort, that pre-exist and lie behind an interpretive activity,

but are formed through the process of interpretation at the same time as the rest of the world. Thus they, too, have the potential to exist in many different ways. For Nietzsche, the subject and object are real in a sense – since nothing exists except interpretations – but not given or essential, and have emerged from more basic dynamic processes of interpretation.[329] As one writer puts it, Nietzsche

> begins by reversing our common linguistic and philosophical habits[,] arguing that what is primary are actions, deeds, accidents, and becomings, rather than subjects, doers, substances, or beings. A naturalistic theory, Nietzsche contends, must start from the former and construct the latter out of them, rather than vice versa. Hence, just as Nietzsche comes to conceive of "a thing" as "the sum of its effects", so, too, does he come to conceive of the subject as the sum of its actions and passions.[330]

Instead of viewing experiences as comprised of a subject, an object, and a relationship between these, Nietzsche posits the whole experience first, and the subject and object and their relations as conceptual divisions, or interpretations.

Some commentators have queried whether this perspectivism is coherent, especially as it relates to the subject. The later Nietzsche presents objects as conceptual constructs created for pragmatic reasons, with no existence in themselves. One might take this to mean that an object is constituted by its properties; however, if, as Nietzsche claims, nothing exists independently of interpretation, then this applies not only to pre-existing substances, but also to independently existing properties. These, like substances, are interpretations from a particular perspective. As Peter Poellner puts it, Nietzsche describes what we think of as objects and subjects as "clusters of continually changing qualities without even relatively enduring substrata."[331] The result, Poellner claims, is that every entity exists only in virtue of its effects on other entities: things exist only as perceptions. Poellner claims this is incoherent when extended to the subject, appearing to make subject *A* ontologically dependent on subject *B* and vice versa. This seems to make the existence of discrete units of consciousness or subjectivity

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[329] BGE s.16, KSA V pp.29–30; GM I.13, KSA V pp.278–81.

[330] Christoph Cox, "The subject of Nietzsche's perspectivism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35:2 (1997): 280.

[331] Peter Poellner, *Nietzsche and metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.279. See also TI Reason ss.1–2, KSA VI pp.74–75.

impossible, raising problems for Nietzsche's emphasis on the individual as the site of self-realisation.[332]

Against Poellner, Steven Hales and Robert Welshon have argued that the notion that all of an entity's properties are relational, while difficult to imagine, is coherent. Whereas Poellner understands the claim that there exists nothing but interpretations to entail a form of idealism, Hales and Welshon take it to present a new kind of ontology, in which the world is constituted of non-atomistic, dynamic forces that are not themselves substances or entities, nor essentially unified with other such forces into particular entities, but that must be pulled together into such entities through a process of interpretation. These forces are themselves capable of interpreting, that is, of unifying experiences into entities, and it is this interpretive activity that creates objects (as well as subjects), as contingent, changing constellations or organisations of force. Hales and Welshon claim, "If the world is perspectivist all the way down, then, from the most fundamental levels of ontology up, there are no things except those composed entirely of quanta of power that have perspectives."[333] However, they acknowledge that Nietzsche does not explain how the bundles of properties, drives, affects, and so on that constitute entities are unified, and that the notion of entirely relational entities is hard to make sense of.[334] While it seems clear that Nietzsche was no idealist (at least, not by design) and that he rejects realism (at least of the usual, commonsense sort) the precise nature of his alternative is difficult to grasp.

9.2.2 The self-referential paradox

Part of the problem is that it is not obvious that Nietzsche's claims about the will to power provide an ontology in the first place. As I have described, Nietzsche denies that we can know how the world is beyond experiences, or, indeed, that there *is* a way the world is beyond the way it is experienced. On the other hand, his demand for continual creativity in order to affirm oneself seems to rely on

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[332] Poellner, *Nietzsche and metaphysics*, pp.293-294.
[333] Steven D. Hales and Robert Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p.79. See also Babette E. Babich, "Nietzsche and scientific power," pp.86–87.
[334] Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism*, pp.81–84.

metaphysical claims: for example, that the world is in flux, contradictory, and chaotic; that it is unlike how it appears to consciousness (more complex, and not amenable to the categories of reason and language); that it lacks causality and is not atomistic; that it is fundamentally will to power.[335] The claim that there exists nothing apart from perspectives[336] itself seems both a statement about the way the world is and inconsistent with a metaphysical picture. Thus Nietzsche's perspectivism and his account of the will to power seem to be incompatible.

Various writers have tried to make sense of this apparent inconsistency and determine the status of these claims, but without much agreement on whether or how Nietzsche escapes self-referential problems.[337] Poellner argues that Nietzsche does not really believe his own sceptical arguments about the lack of a reality behind interpretations, but only uses them to undermine the ideals he attacks.[338] Stephen Houlgate maintains that the world described by Nietzsche's positive statements is not a "real" world, but the world of sensory experience, which is misunderstood and misrepresented by consciousness and language.[339] Sarah Kofman claims something similar, arguing that for Nietzsche conscious life is a metaphorical (and therefore both fundamentally different and inadequate)

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[335] GM Preface 1, II.8, KSA V pp.247–48, 305–7; TI Reason, Errors ss.3–4, 7, KSA VI pp.74–79, 90–92, 95–96; BGE ss.12–13, KSA V pp.26–28; Z II Self-overcoming, III Law-tables s.8, KSA IV pp.146–49, 252.

[336] GM III.12, KSA V pp.363–65; TI Socrates s.3, Improvers s.1; KSA VI pp.68–69, 98.

[337] Those arguing that the self-referential paradox is a problem for Nietzsche include: John Atwell, "Nietzsche's perspectivism," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 157–70; Nick Trakakis, "Nietzsche's perspectivism and problems of self-refutation," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 46:181 (2006): 91–110; Williams, "On making Nietzsche consistent". Attempts to show Nietzsche escapes problems with the paradox include: R. Lanier Anderson, "Truth and objectivity in perspectivism," *Synthese* 115 (1998): 1–32; Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on truth and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Daniel Conway, "Perspectivism and persuasion," *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988): 555–62; Christoph Cox, "Nietzsche, naturalism, and interpretation" *International Studies in Philosophy* 27:3 (1995): 3–18; Rüdiger Grimm, "Circularity and self-reference in Nietzsche," *Metaphilosophy* 10, no.3–4 (1979): 289–305; Steven Hales, "A consistent relativism," *Mind* 106 (1997): 33–52; Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism*; Lawrence Hinman, "Nietzsche, metaphor, and truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43 (1982): 179–99; Alexander Nehamas, "Immanent and transcendent perspectivism in Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien* 12 (1983): 473–90; Reginster, "Perspectivism, criticism and freedom"; Schrift, *The question of interpretation*; Tomislav Zelic, "Nietzsche's theory of multiperspectivism revisited," *Synthesis Philosophica* 22 (2007): 231–44.

[338] Poellner, *Nietzsche and metaphysics*, pp.14–18, 137.

[339] Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the criticism of metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.52.

expression of the most basic reality: human sensation.[340] R. Lanier Anderson also argues along these lines: "What lies behind the appearances of consciousness is not a special class of objects – denizens of a separate, metaphysical world – but rather contents of representation that lie 'below the surface' of consciousness."[341]

While, as we have seen, Nietzsche does emphasise the importance of non-conscious experience for human life, and describes a "metaphorical" relation between this kind of experience and consciousness, these responses do not help with the self-referential paradox. These approaches assume epistemological access to an area – whether a "real" world or a level of unconscious human experience – beyond language and consciousness. The ability to describe in language either kind of extra-conscious realm is explicitly denied by Nietzsche (which denial Poellner construes as disingenuous), and, more problematically, if it were possible would lead to the damaging consequences Nietzsche identifies of believing in the possibility of access to objective truths.

It has also been argued that Nietzsche's perspectivism accepts inconsistency, and that systematising his claims undermines one of his central points: the importance of ambiguity, conflict, uncertainty, and variety in interpretation. On these lines, Erik Parens argues that the tension in Nietzsche's thought is a "fertile and serious" one that it is more productive to leave in play than to resolve.[342] Nietzsche criticises the notion that life or experience fits the categories of reason and logic, so it is not necessarily appropriate to demand that his work submit to their requirements. For example, as several commentators have noted, Nietzsche sees the law of non-contradiction as a symptom of a human inability, rather than a reflection of an extra-human reality.[343] Consequently, the demand that interpretations conform to this criterion of acceptability is a contingent one, and one that Nietzsche attempts to undermine; thus we should

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[340] Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and metaphor* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), p.139.
[341] R. Lanier Anderson, "Sensualism and unconscious representations in Nietzsche's account of knowledge," *International Studies in Philosophy* 34:3 (2002): 108; see also Babich, "Nietzsche and scientific power," p.82.
[342] Erik Parens, "From philosophy to politics: On Nietzsche's ironic metaphysics of will to power," *Man and World: An International Philosophical Review* (1991): 172.
[343] Babich, "Nietzsche and scientific power," p.81; Rex Welshon, "Skepticism, antirealism, and perspectivism in Nietzsche's epistemology," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 37 (2009): 25; Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism*, p.55.

expect him to flaunt this rule. There is something to this type of approach to apparent self-referential problems in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche aims to subvert and undermine the usual structures for conceiving of and conversing about the world, which he finds both damaging and unjustified even according to their own standards of rationality, objectivity, and morality, but in particular in relation to his values of power, multiplicitousness, and beauty. We should, therefore, not necessarily demand that his forms of persuasion follow the rules and methodology that we have laid down for discourse about the world. Indeed, granted that these structures are deep-rooted and fundamental to our current way of being, we should expect disruption, confusion, and violations of our expectations for knowledge as we confront an attempt to think outside them.

This does not mean, however, that we should not try to make sense of Nietzsche's claims; only that doing so may not be possible or advisable on the basis of familiar methods. One possibility for making Nietzsche's claims comprehensible is that he presents his positive statements as hypotheses, and thus that while they are metaphysical claims, they do not conflict with his denial of the possibility of establishing the accuracy of such claims. In other words, they are examples of the kind of myth-making that he advocates: provisional accounts of experience needed to function and to affirm life, but not supposed to be accurate descriptions of reality. As we have seen, Nietzsche often suggests that his beliefs should not be taken up as universally applicable; while he does argue for his position, he does not claim it as dogmatic truth. Nietzsche may wish to persuade readers to adopt his interpretation of experiences, but without maintaining that it is objectively true. Thus his positive statements may not claim access to metaphysical reality, but be chosen with regard to their likely consequences.[344]

9.2.3 Myth and the world

9.2.3.1 An immanent realism?

This leaves at least two questions. First, can Nietzsche persuade his readers that he is right, if he admits that his view of the world is only a perspective? I deal

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[344] Grimm, "Circularity and self-reference in Nietzsche"; Kofman, *Nietzsche and metaphor*.

with this question in the next section. Second, if Nietzsche's positive claims are expressions of the myth-making capacity that he urges his audience to exercise, what, if any, role do things beyond these beliefs play in their development? Although Nietzsche explicitly denies the existence of a thing-in-itself or a "real" world, commentators are usually concerned to retain some form of extra-individual reality with which interpretations engage, in order to avoid attributing idealism or solipsism to Nietzsche. For example, Maudemarie Clark distinguishes "things-in-themselves", which Nietzsche rejects, from "things themselves", which she claims he retains and are, she claims, "extramentally existing things in contrast to representations".[345] Tsarina Doyle uses an analogy with Lockean tertiary qualities to suggest that wills to power arise from interactions with other wills to power,[346] although it is not clear from Doyle's account how these could function without an underlying substratum, which Nietzsche denies exists.

A more promising approach is to emphasise the continuity between processes that we normally conceive of as physical (e.g., eating, movement, reproduction) and those we conceive as mental (e.g., understanding, awareness of our environment, subjectivity), which Nietzsche establishes in his genealogical account of consciousness. Daniel Conway, among others, claims that it is a strength of Nietzsche's account of interpretation that it situates the perspectives that we have on the world not outwith the world as a transcendent ground of impressions and representations, but firmly within it, as an outcome of affects and interests.[347] According to David Owen, who presents a similar view, for Nietzsche

> Our consciousness is neither disembedded nor disembodied; knowing, like
> seeing, is an activity which attends the embedded and embodied character of
> human subjectivity. Consequently, we can conclude that for Nietzsche our
> cognitive constitution is not separable from our affective constitution, our
> cognitive interests are not independent of our affective interests: *logos* is

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[345] Clark, *Nietzsche on truth and philosophy*, p.82.

[346] Tsarina Doyle, *Nietzsche on epistemology and metaphysics: The world in view* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), pp.175ff.

[347] Daniel Conway, "The eyes have it: Perspectives and immanent investment," *International Studies in Philosophy* 23:2 (1991): 105, 107; see also Conway, "Disembodied perspectives," *Nietzsche-Studien* 21 (1992): 289; Conway, "Thus spoke Rorty," p.109; Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism* pp.75, 79; Nehamas, "Immanent and transcendent perspectivism," p.480; Cox, "Nietzsche, naturalism, and interpretation," pp.6–7.

entwined with *eros*. Thus, the basic character of perspectivism is that it emphasises the contextual character of our knowledge (beliefs) about the world and claims that the kind of knowledge about the world we have is not independent of our affective interests.[348]

Stated generally, the problem is how Nietzsche avoids attributing a transcendent status to representations, that is, a gulf between interpretations and that which is interpreted. For Nietzsche, all life's processes are fundamentally interpretive powers.[349] The result is a monistic account of existence that attempts to subvert the dichotomy between mind and world. As R. Lanier Anderson points out, "Nietzsche's perspectivism [...] attempts to carve out a middle way between strong realism and wholesale relativism."[350] The problem, perhaps due to the linguistic and conceptual prejudices Nietzsche identifies, is that it is difficult for us to imagine this. We tend to feel that there is a metaphysical reality independent of our experiences, and that the only alternative is that experiences are subjective constructions. It is hard for us to imagine how things could be both real and dependent on interpretation, not only for how they appear, but for their existence.

Anderson insists that Nietzsche espouses neither idealism or solipsism, and points out that, in attempting to save our common-sense notion of things as theory-independent, commentators can miss how far-reaching Nietzsche's challenge to our usual worldview is: "it is among the great contributions of Nietzsche's epistemology that he recognised the power and plausibility of the rationalist metaphysical realism he was arguing against, and also that much of our traditional way of thinking would have to be abandoned along with it."[351] The following passage reveals how problematic this aspect of Nietzsche's thought is:

> This is the essence of phenomenalism and perspectivism as *I* understand them: Owing to the nature of *animal consciousness*, the world of which we can become conscious is only a surface- and sign-world, a world that is made common and meaner; whatever becomes conscious *becomes* by the

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[348] Owen *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, pp.33; see also p.37.

[349] See also Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism*, p.79; Babich, "Nietzsche and scientific power," p.87; Jean Granier, "Perspectivism and interpretation," in Allison, *The new Nietzsche*.

[350] Anderson, "Truth and objectivity in perspectivism," p.1; see Granier, "Perspectivism and interpretation".

[351] Anderson, "Overcoming charity," 327–28.

same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalisation. [.....]

You will guess that it is not the opposition of subject and object that concerns me here: This distinction I leave to the epistemologists who have become entangled in the snares of grammar (the metaphysics of the people). It is even less the opposition of "thing-in-itself" and appearance; for we do not "know" nearly enough to be allowed just to *divide* like that. We simply lack any organ for *knowledge*, for "truth": we "know" (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be *useful* in the interests of the human herd, the species; and even what is here called "utility" is ultimately also a mere belief, something imaginary, and perhaps precisely that most calamitous stupidity of which we shall one day perish.[352]

Starting with the emphasis on the "I" in the first line, which could be taken to throw doubt on the extent of Nietzsche's commitment to the claims he is about to make or to undermine their objectivity, the passage raises questions about our usual way of approaching metaphysical claims. The text goes on to state one version of the falsification thesis – that conscious representations falsify unconscious experience – before, in the next paragraph, stating a broader thesis that may or may not (depending on your stance on the self-referential paradox) contradict the earlier statement: that we are not entitled to call "knowledge" anything we think we know. In particular, Nietzsche claims, this includes knowledge about whether beliefs misrepresent things-in-themselves. The passage suggests that the appearance-reality distinction is a misleading presupposition when thinking about consciousness, experience, and life in general. Nietzsche blames the grammatical categories of language for this confusion, implying that his perspectivism is an attempt to get out from under the oppositions of subject and object, reality and representation, that characterise previous approaches to epistemology and continue to be so hard to escape.

9.2.3.2 Interpretation and the other

The question of the relation between interpretations and elements usually thought to transcend individual experience is even more problematic when applied to the relationships of the perspectival individual with other human beings. Above (7.2),

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[352] GS s.354, KSA III p.593.

I showed how Nietzsche presents the individual as continuous with, and emerging from, social forms of life, and in 9.2 I suggested that he sees consciousness in general as continuous with physical processes. I have also discussed how Nietzsche's emphasis on interpretation, perspectivism, and mastery can be reconciled with his recognition of resistance and otherness in the form of other people (see 7.3.1, 7.4.1). His response to this tension is to advocate repeated attempts to escape constraint by the other: We are to break free of the determination of our way of being by social life by reinterpreting and taking responsibility for the affects and drives that have been instilled in us in this way. As I have argued, Nietzsche thinks we must order and direct our feelings and perceptions of others along with our other drives and affects and in the same way. In other words, for Nietzsche, the other is encountered primarily as an experience available to be exploited, rather than as another self transcending our experience.

The situation is similar to our encounter with aspects of existence that are not other subjects. Indeed, for Nietzsche the human individual is not privileged as a locus of interpretation; rather, interpretation is the character of life in general,[353] so there is no reason to expect interactions with other human beings to be profoundly different from interactions with other entities and processes. As with all entities and events, when we encounter other individuals we find ourselves in relation with something or someone that we experience as outside ourselves, that both resists and allows the realisation of our will. Nietzsche does not provide a clear picture of the metaphysical status of other human beings any more than he does for the status of the rest of the world. As I indicated above, this lack of clarity may be inevitable in an account that subverts usual ways of understanding ourselves as individuals in relation to our world, including the social world. However, it does have the unfortunate result that Nietzsche's model for social relations seems unable to take account of the subjectivity of others, and even to therefore license abuse, or as at times to verge on solipsism.

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[353] Babich, "Nietzsche and scientific power," pp.86–87; Christoph Cox, "The subject of Nietzsche's perspectivism," p.284; Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's perspectivism*, p.21.

9.2.4 Perspectivism, value, and alienation

One outcome of this problem is that it is not obvious whether and how for Nietzsche the various myths or perspectives espoused by different individuals can engage with each other: in other words, how and if one person can persuade another that her interpretation should be adopted. As Clark notes, perspectivism throws into question the grounds for agreement not just on epistemological grounds, but also those of value.[354] Nietzsche is clear that the value ascribed to existence on the basis of the subject and objective morality, and the way of life that emerges from this value, depend on spurious and damaging premises. However, his demand for life to be affirmed on an intrinsic basis relies on a value for enhancing power and creativity. If Nietzsche's scepticism about a real world is genuine, he cannot claim that these are characteristic of life, particularly human life, and therefore need to be encouraged and endorsed in order to affirm existence. There seems then no basis for following his prescriptions.

This is clearly a problem when applied to Nietzsche's claim that constant interpretive activity expresses fundamental drives to create and dominate, and that adherence to purportedly universal, given, objective worldviews stifles these (and other) drives. Nietzsche's denial that the world or the subject exist separately from interpretations means that, like everything else, drives and impulses exist only as part of actual worldviews. Although Nietzsche's demand to liberate ourselves from social worldviews seems to be driven by their stifling and repression of individuals, it seems that there can be no repressed and misrepresented individuals who are damaged by their social construction. Why should we care whether our ways of viewing the world allow us to dominate, create, and be beautiful?

One possibility that we saw above is that Nietzsche presents his positive claims not as statements of fact, but as positions that should be adopted because of their consequences.[355] Under prevailing social interpretations human beings are

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[354] Clark, *Nietzsche on truth*, p.151.
[355] Others have argued that Nietzsche's perspectivism allows debate between perspectives on the basis of rhetorical strategies or overlapping beliefs, values, or standards of justification. For the former, see Conway, "Perspectivism and persuasion." For the latter, see Anderson, "Truth and objectivity"; Clark, *Nietzsche on truth*, p.141; Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, pp.38–39; Reginster, "Perspectivism, criticism, and freedom".

weak and miserable, and cannot affirm life. Under interpretations of the kind Nietzsche advocates, they can become powerful, beautiful, and loving of life. Viewing oneself as a dynamic, self-constructing entity with a fundamental need to create and overcome is more valuable than viewing oneself as a static, given subject because doing so allows one to take joy in existence even in the face of the collapse of the structures that have, until now, allowed human beings to do so.[356] In short, Nietzsche's prescriptions are made in the context of a specific problem: the problem of modern alienation. The transience and suffering that we encounter, as well as the conflict between our emergence as separate, conscious individuals and the demands of social existence, have always required interpretive structures and practices of self-modification in order to allow life to be accepted and affirmed. It is when we must appropriate and endorse life in a context in which we are alienated from ways that do so in a comfortable, comforting, and pleasant way that we should constitute ourselves as hard, creative-destructive, dominating, and beautiful individuals.[357]

9.3 Isolation and alienation

Nietzsche's later perspectivism identifies desiderata for, and problems with, an immanent, one-world model for taking joy in existence. In particular, his claims that we should ascribe value to life on the basis of how we experience it rather than on the basis of structures that insist that it is pleasant, gentle, and amenable to our purposes, and that we should live according to the way we experience ourselves rather than according to ideals we impose upon ourselves, suggest the direction that an immanent means of loving life should take.

In the last three chapters I described the hardness and isolation that Nietzsche presents as necessary for self-affirmation in the face of the painful,

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[356] Nietzsche's critique of the subject as leading to nihilism supports this interpretation.

[357] The consistency this gives Nietzsche's account should not be overstated. The later Nietzsche uses language of repression, suppression, sublimation, and self-abnegation to describe the effects of society on individuals and of authenticity, expressivity, and fulfillment for the way of being of creative individuals. He may retain elements of an expressive vision of the self even in his later work (see Owen, "On failing to be agents: Freedom, servitude, and the concept of the weak in Nietzsche's practical philosophy," *Philosophical Topics* 33:2 (2005): 151), indicating drives and urges that pre-exist interpretation and realisation.

destructive nature of existence. I argued that this cuts off the self-affirming individual from aspects of her own experience and from others, leaving her longing for companionship that can rarely, if ever, come to pass. In other words, this response to alienation leaves the individual alienated, indeed, more alienated, and more painfully aware of this alienation, than before. The solution Nietzsche suggests for coping with this situation is to construct oneself as hard enough to exult in life under these circumstances. However, as I described in chapter 7, even this approach is made difficult by the impossibility of escaping entanglement with others. The iterative process of self-creation that Nietzsche presents as the means of affirming life is based on a tension between painful and difficult aloneness and suppression and enforced self-alienation by social mores.

Nonetheless, Nietzsche's response to alienation contains valuable insights that I suggest must be taken as foundational for a sophisticated attempt to cope with modern alienation. His critiques of the subject and the worldviews of which it forms an integral part encourage the reader to recognise the paradoxes and gaps in this model, which is still often taken as objective or adopted unreflectively. It also demands that we confront the reality and inescapability of pain and finitude, recognising that the desire for life must be reconciled with the fact that we suffer, and that this is not necessarily easy to do. His work helps undermine the commitment to a way of understanding the self, its roles, and its environment that has associations with a problematic mind-body dualism, the denigration of the body, and an often intolerant and even violent universalising tendency. But more than that, it recognises the conflicting urges, beliefs, feelings, and needs that we experience as living beings, and the multiplicity of possibilities for responding to and even conceiving of the situations in which we find ourselves. In the final part of this thesis, I argue that a response to alienation should incorporate these insights, but that it is possible and necessary to do so while granting a central and positive place to being-with-others.

Part 3 Critical comparison: Creating an immanent affirmation

The first two parts of this thesis have described Novalis and Nietzsche as philosophers of affirmation, developing new ways of loving life for an alienated modernity. I argued that both saw their contemporaries as struggling with an experience of themselves as isolated individuals, cut off from others, horrified by the ubiquity and apparent meaninglessness of suffering, transience, and death, and dismayed by their own lack of transparency to themselves. I showed how both Novalis and Nietzsche used a critique of reason and a reinstatement of devalued aspects of life to reimagine the human being and its relationship to the terrible and inevitable processes of what had come to seem an alien world. I claimed that both attempted to escape prevailing dualistic constructions of the universe, including of the human being, that denigrated mundane existence or ascribed to it an extrinsic value, and examined the roles of community and myth in their attempts to do this.

Part 3 compares these responses to alienation in order to identify characteristics that should be adopted by an immanent philosophy of affirmation. In chapter 10, I analyse the respective successes and failures of Novalis' and Nietzsche's work, considered as attempts to foster an affirmative attitude towards life that acknowledges the reality, inescapability, and apparent meaninglessness of suffering and death without recourse to otherworldly foundations. The comparison highlights the contributions that each makes to the task of responding to modern alienation, as well as some of the drawbacks, oversights, and lapses of their attempts. In chapter 11 I use these findings to suggest criteria for a convincing and satisfying response to alienation.

Chapter 10 Self and other in Novalis' and Nietzsche's work on affirmation

10.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the implications of the differences between the attempts of Novalis and Nietzsche to provide means of immanent affirmation. I have argued that neither gives a fully satisfactory response to alienation, and I use the comparison in part to explore their strengths and weaknesses in more depth. Both writers share what I argue are important strengths: they stress the need for an affirmation of existence to address the reality of death and suffering, and focus on creativity, dynamism, and questioning as characteristics of such an affirmation, allowing flexible, non-dogmatic responses to pain and alienation. I identify a further strength in Novalis' emphasis on the value of community for his project of world-building. His weaknesses are the centrality of his pantheism, which suggests a basis in the transcendent in the form of the absolute self, and his overoptimistic view of social interaction. Nietzsche's account recognises the dangers of oppression, deception, and misunderstanding in human relations, and is also more consistent in rejecting reliance on a supposedly objective model of the universe, while recognising the difficulties in doing so. On the other hand, his stress on individual myth-making is neither a satisfactory answer to alienation nor entailed by his critiques of reason and religion.

In the first part of the chapter, I compare Novalis' and Nietzsche's critiques of reason, consciousness, and language as sources of alienation, finding extensive parallels despite Nietzsche's more thoroughgoing scepticism of sources of knowledge. This intractable scepticism contributes to what I claim is his problematically individualistic account of self-affirmation. In section 2, I ask about the relative strengths of their attempts to overcome dualism, atomism, and mechanistic thinking. Section 3 explores differences in their resulting models of selfhood. In section 4 I investigate the differences in their accounts entailed by Novalis' incorporation of the transcendent, as absolute self, and Nietzsche's denial of any object beyond individual experience. Section 5 compares the conceptions of community that emerge from this difference.

10.2 Alienation, consciousness, and the individual

10.2.1 Old and new narratives for living with alienation

As I described in the introduction to this thesis, in western Europe the self was long experienced and interpreted in relation to God, including in response to a biblical narrative of the human being as God's creation who had fallen away from him in sin. This may have constituted the human being as an alienated self in certain respects, but gave a relatively clear sense not only of who we are, but also of how we should behave and what would become of us. In other words, the sense that human existence was conditioned by the divine established our identity and place in the universe. It also offered a reassuring explanation, or delimited the conditions for an explanation, of suffering, transience, and death.

Both Novalis and Nietzsche were concerned that this narrative background engendered a view of the human being as a sinner who had to repudiate aspects of herself and material existence in order to be saved, which was itself an alienated way of understanding the self and its world. The rise of scepticism about established forms of religion emphasized this alienating effect by removing the associated narrative of passage from and to non-alienation. Both Novalis and Nietzsche believe that the modern individual retains the sense of alienation ingrained by these accounts, along with the recognition that the world is a place of suffering and misery, but is no longer immersed in comforting narratives about the situation. In other words, she finds herself alienated, but without a reassuring sense of the meaning of this alienation or an idea of how it could be escaped. It seems modern individuals lack a means of determining who they are, how they should act, why they suffer, or what will become of them, and death in particular seems a terrifying denial of everything they want and value.

Nietzsche's description of the death of God expresses this realisation that we are alone in the universe. Novalis, too, points out that a scientific worldview leaves us in a world stripped of spirit, precluding a relationship with a God who can lead us out of alienation (see 2.3). Here is also a major difference between the two, however: Novalis aims to show how, despite the divisive and alienating effects of scientific rationality, we can find our way back to God, whereas

Nietzsche denies that this is possible. Novalis reconstitutes the Christian narrative, modifying it to take account of the critique of faith by reason and the fact that it seems to conflict with the way the world appears to his contemporaries. He explains this opacity as due to a distance between an underlying unity that is available to the creative imagination, and an overlying, individuated realm of nature that can be grasped consciously (see 3.1, 5.2.2). Salvation is a movement from a way of being based on the latter to one based on the former, through making this intuition available to consciousness. In other words, when combined with faith, in the form of intuition, discursive consciousness can be a reliable, if incomplete, source of knowledge. For Nietzsche, however, God is a fiction, and neither faith nor reason can mediate knowledge. Novalis' approach is not viable for Nietzsche, for whom human beings are irrevocably alone in a universe they cannot understand. Nietzsche's response is to instead try to revalue this isolation as itself something that can be accepted and affirmed. To do so, he must overturn (rather than reconcile) old narratives about God and redemption and the new, predominantly rationalistic, worldview. According to Nietzsche the latter, in offering its own kind of explanation for the world, appears to provide new conditions of possibility for justifying it, but in fact precludes such a justification. In short, Novalis responds to alienation by salvaging aspects of both traditional religious and scientific accounts, while Nietzsche presents both kinds of story as themselves irremediably – although as we will see, not *irredeemably* – alienating.

10.2.2 The development of consciousness and the individual

Both Novalis and Nietzsche see the problem of alienation as an outcome of the rise of reason – in fact, of the development of consciousness itself. For both, self-awareness, language, and mental representations separate conscious awareness from unconscious experiences, including one's own non-conscious interior life as well as any world beyond the self. Both construe this separation as, at least to a degree, an inescapable condition of human existence, but claim that more articulated and refined forms of consciousness exacerbate the distance (see 2.3, 2.7.2). While Novalis is more optimistic than Nietzsche about mitigating the

degree of separation, for him too it is a condition of possibility for individuality and therefore inescapable while we live.

Despite identifying alienating effects of consciousness, both writers see the development of consciousness and scientific thought as having positive aspects, and a response to the resulting alienation as needing to retain these, albeit with modifications. For both thinkers the development of human thought has led to the emergence of culture and individuality. For Novalis, a more sophisticated and intellectual way of life comes hand in hand with both greater individuation and greater alienation. In chapter 2 I described his account of the loss of the original community of humankind with nature through the advent of scientific reason (2.6). I also explained how, since for Novalis individuality and highly developed consciousness are necessary for the self-revelation of God, the emergence of more intricate social arrangements and intellectual cultures allows fuller self-knowledge. The unification under poetic interpretation of these more individuated ways of being with an intuition of divine unity is the path to the organic unity that Novalis presents as the optimal self-realisation of God (see 2.8). Thus for Novalis, the emergence of discursive reason, as a divisive and alienating interpretive force, is an antithesis to a preceding state of the world that was less rational and more unified. This overly rational antithesis prepares the ground for a subsequent synthesis into a more complex and self-conscious organic whole.

Like Novalis, Nietzsche describes a fall of human beings from an originally immediate and self-affirming, non- or less-alienated state, through the development of the intellect, to a situation of alienation. The development of language and consciousness, and then social life and morality, led to the emergence of culture and new ways of being, including most importantly the conscious individual and, more specifically, the subject. The latter, which is how we currently exist, is for Nietzsche problematically alienated, but also provides the conditions of possibility for more sophisticated, varied, and interesting ways of life (see 7.2). Nietzsche's model, like Novalis', describes a spiral in which an increased level of consciousness and sophistication should be maintained while being reconstructed to avoid some of its negative consequences.

For both Novalis and Nietzsche there is no self without alienation in the sense of separation both between individuals and their world (including other individuals) and between conscious representations and other forms of experience. For Nietzsche, this permits richness, diversity, and greatness in ways of life, although he points out dangers that he believes attend the constitution of the self in society and the inadequacies and incompleteness of consciousness. Similarly, for Novalis the highly developed rational awareness of the self and its environment should be maintained along with the complex articulations of modern social relations that have developed through alienation from the absolute, but we now need to retrieve for this model nonrational elements that have been cast out and derogated.

10.2.3 Retrieving our selves

For both Novalis and Nietzsche, alienation is partly a result of one's sense of oneself as a conscious individual, separate from one's surroundings. But it is also in part due to suppressing, denying, or maligning aspects of one's self, and projecting other aspects that are not denigrated into a spiritual or "real" realm that is out of one's reach, or onto a God understood as separate from oneself (see 2.3, 6.2). The human being is fragmented, unable to accept and endorse all her characteristics. On Novalis' model, God, and the positive attributes that accrue to him, is in fact integral to oneself as part of the absolute, and realising this reveals life's value, showing not only that we in fact possess characteristics thought to be valuable, but also that the characteristics we had thought of as negative, such as sensuality, emotions, and the physical, are also expressions of spirit. Even those aspects of God that seem least compatible with the transient, changeable world we experience, such as his omniscience, omnipotence, and infinitude, are presented by Novalis as manifested in the spatio-temporal unfolding of the universe, rather than as static states existing outside the physical world (see 2.3, 3.2).[358]

Nietzsche's solution is different. For him, God is a fiction, as is the realm of being that has also been thought to carry the properties we value and to underlie

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[358] Novalis, „Fichte-Studien," II p.566 #269–71.

the particularised existence of things, including human beings. For the later Nietzsche, the retrieval of value for experience must be for our transient, embodied lives as individuals; it cannot be for human beings as parts of a larger whole, as this undermines individual self-affirmation. Nietzsche claims that positive attributes such as creativity, goodness, power, and spirituality do not belong to a distant God, but are human qualities that we should reappropriate.[359] Other of God's attributes, such as omniscience, omnipotence, and infinitude, are fictions. Finally, Nietzsche claims that traits that have been called "evil" and suppressed also belong to human beings as individuals. He thus takes a different approach to Novalis, who determines that parts of existence that have often been thought of as lifeless or sinful are in fact active and spiritual and therefore good; Nietzsche rejects the evaluation of either as good or evil. He claims that "evil" drives, such as cruelty, selfishness, and the urge to dominate, should be affirmed as such, as at least as useful and productive as "good" drives: "'Man is evil' – all the wisest men have told me that to comfort me. Ah, if only it be true today. For evil is man's best strength."[360] They are not, however, good in the usual sense of the word. They can be viewed positively, desired and endorsed, but that is not the same as believing that the darker side of humanity is in fact rational, spiritual, or morally justified.

Novalis, unlike Nietzsche, does not consider the neglected physical and emotional sides of the human being to be antisocial or potentially disturbing. This is a result of his pantheism, which entails that the universe embodies the good. He assumes that when we perceive nature as it really is, we will realise that it is a manifestation of the very characteristics – spirituality, rationality, activity – that we currently understand as antithetical to it. He integrates denigrated, non-rational aspects of existence with valued spiritual aspects in a modified traditional account of value, construing alienated characteristics, whether usually valued as positive or as negative, as both "good" and our own, as participants in God's goodness.

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[359] GM II.18, KSA V pp.325–27.
[360] Z IV Higher man s.5, KSA IV p.359; see also my discussion in 6.4.3.1, 7.3.1.

10.2.4 Reason and religion

Unlike Novalis, Nietzsche sees what he understands as the Christian moral system and its metaphysics of God, eternal life, and the soul as being closely connected with consciousness and reason, sharing presuppositions as well as problematic consequences. Partly as a result, his response to the prevailing, one-sidedly rational worldview that he critiques can depend neither on a reconstruction of religious themes nor on confidence in reason's ability to provide answers. Nietzsche maintains that scientific reason and Christianity share presuppositions that perpetuate alienation, including belief in a real world, the constitution of the universe as atomistic, the characterisation of relations between these atoms as involving either causality or free will, and the conviction that the subject is capable of self-determined action. As we have seen, for Nietzsche not just scientific thinking but consciousness itself is based on these categories. As conscious individuals, we cannot easily escape our construction as active subjects, nor the moral imperatives that this promotes, even once we know them to be interpretations of more complex underlying events. For Nietzsche the moral commitments, and indeed origins, of Christianity tie it to a subject-metaphysics that underlie discursive thought, particularly Western thought, and that Enlightenment scientific thought merely takes to its logical conclusion.

As we have seen, Novalis also views consciousness as necessarily involving a subject-object dichotomy and constructing an alienated self. However, for Novalis, human beings have intuitive and immediate access to unconscious and non-discursive experience within and outside the individual, which they can integrate – imperfectly, to be sure – in their conscious self-awareness, helping overcome that dichotomy and that alienation. This overleaping of the borders of subjectivity is inspired by anti-intellectual and mystical strands within Christianity, which Novalis, unlike Nietzsche, does not see as essentially connected to the calculative categories of scientific reason. In fact, he believes that the ideal that Christianity struggles to express is inadequately revealed in doctrines that articulate it for discursive thought. Christian myths invite the appropriation and modification of this ideal on the basis of other, non-rational

forms of knowledge. Novalis claims that we have immediate access to the self and the world through intuition and imagination, on the basis of the continuity of all things, and that this intuitive access can be partially articulated through poetic interpretation. The latter process involves the participation of the emotions, senses, and imagination as well as the mind, and of the object as well as the subject, undermining the distinctions between these (see 2.3, 3.2). Novalis is thus optimistic about the possibility of using particular, "poetic", forms of language and mental representations to overcome the dichotomies that he (and Nietzsche) see as characteristic of consciousness, particularly discursive rationality, and contemporary experience generally.

For neither Novalis nor Nietzsche is interpretation a product of conscious activity alone. Like for Novalis, for Nietzsche one's interpreting activity takes shape not only as a narrative that makes sense of one's actions and experiences, but also as actions, gestures, and movements, ideally combined into a beautiful or coherent way of life.[361] For Novalis, as I have described, its production involves the participation of unconscious attributes. In Nietzsche's account, the self's various drives compete for dominance and form constellations that lead to actions mostly unconsciously. The domination, mastery, and expansion of power that Nietzsche describes as characteristics of interpretation are originally unreflective and immediate, and conscious interpretation is merely a new wrinkle in this longstanding process (see 7.2.1). It is privileged with respect neither to its degree of power over other aspects of the self, nor to its grasp on what is really going on in human activity. The interaction between drives that goes on in interpretation is for Nietzsche an uneasy and unstable struggle with no common goal, rather than, as for Novalis, a shared operation towards a mutual end.

Nietzsche also dismisses the "immediate certainty" that Novalis sees as a basis for knowledge. He is sceptical both of reason's ability to create a non-alienated vision of the self and of emotional or non-rational access to one's self or the rest of the world. More precisely, although Nietzsche insists that human

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[361] Novalis describes this way of life as a "figure" (see 2.5), and Nietzsche as one's "style" (e.g., GS s.290, KSA III p.530).

experience is not simply conscious, but also takes place at an unconscious level, he denies that we can have conscious knowledge of the latter kind of experience. The two realms remain separate; the human being is opaque to itself.[362]

Stephen Houlgate has tried to reduce the degree of separation in Nietzsche's account between prelinguistic awareness, manifested in feeling, sense, and vision, and language and consciousness: "What Nietzsche denies is that we can accurately and definitively articulate the character of life in words, but he does not deny that we can be aware of the complexity of human life in various ways and use words to point to (*bezeichnen*) what we are aware of."[363] This intuition, according to Houlgate, is not unmediated knowledge of reality, but an intimation of the complexities of the "apparent" realm of human experience. Language, though unable to capture experience, can point towards it metaphorically.

However, this gives a misleading picture of the extent to which Nietzsche believes the various levels of human experience can communicate. It is true that he describes a "metaphorical" relationship between consciousness and unconscious experiences, and furthermore a "metaphorical" or "metonymical" relationship between one's experiences and an apparently external world. But whereas Novalis presents such a suggestive or tropic relationship as the key to knowledge, Nietzsche uses these claims to attack the idea that we can know what the world or our selves are like. In the first place, for Nietzsche the "external" world, like the self, is constructed in interpretation and granted the illusion of reality, rather than given prior to interpretation.[364] Secondly, the various levels of experience are so inaccessible to each other and likely so fundamentally different from each other as to render each translation from one kind of experience to another a complete change in the nature of the experience. This is the case even for the early Nietzsche: "To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into

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[362] TI Errors ss.3, 4, KSA VI pp.90–92; GM Preface 1, KSA V pp.247–48.
[363] Houlgate, *Criticism of metaphysics*, p.52.
[364] KSA VII 19 [204].

the middle of an entirely new and different one".[365] For the later Nietzsche, too, as his critiques of willing and the subject make clear, conscious and linguistic articulations of other forms of experience are not just inadequate to the latter in the sense that they are incomplete, but also because they change the nature of the experience, encountering it only in their own terms. To be sure, we have, and are aware of, sensory, perceptual, and emotional as well as intellectual experiences, but any intellectual or linguistic account we give of these is not just incomplete and misleading, but represents a complete alteration in the nature of the experience. These non-intellectual levels of experience, as well as the ways, if any, that they interact with and affect conscious experience, are inalterably unknowable. A valorisation of the entire human being cannot, according to Nietzsche, rely on comprehending what goes on within oneself, nor, to be sure, in a world outside those experiences: that is simply impossible.

Thus although, like Novalis, Nietzsche views activity and interpretation, rather than objective observation, as the means by which we encounter the world, for the latter this does not result in access, however incomplete, to that world or even the self, allowing genuine dialogue with that world or within that self. Nietzsche describes a construction of world and self that is self-directed, that is, concerned with the coordination and enhancement of the self, rather than with its ability to connect with others and feel itself embedded in its surroundings. Both writers see the task of interpretation as making the individual at home in the world, but whereas for Novalis this requires showing how the self engages authentically with its environment,[366] for Nietzsche it means constructing the environment as a reflection of the needs and capacities of the self.[367]

10.3 Myth and metaphysics

10.3.1 Interpretation and critical distance

For both Novalis and Nietzsche, the new worldviews to be created are myths and should be explicitly understood as such, that is, as fictional, and as provisional

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[365] TL, KSA I p.879.
[366] Novalis, „Allgemeine Brouillon," III p.434 #857.
[367] HH s.11, KSA II p.30; GM Preface 1, KSA V pp.247–48; TI Errors ss.3, 4, KSA VI pp.90–92.

and temporary. For Nietzsche we should see them as particular means of interpreting experiences, rather than attempts to grasp the truth in a traditional sense. For Novalis, mythical constructions do try to grasp the essence of things, but should be recognised as necessarily falling short of this goal, and therefore for him too are interpretive and provisional. In other words, both claim we should retain a critical distance from our worldviews while using them to negotiate experiences and guide behaviour. Rather than immersing ourselves unreflectively in these models, we should adopt a self-conscious stance towards them as their creators. The ideal attitude towards the self and the universe is ironic, playful, and destructive-creative, cognisant that interpretations are always open to revision.

As I suggested in chapter 8, one might ask whether this critical or ironic distance is an exacerbation of alienation (8.3.2). How can we feel at home in the world or comfortable in ourselves if we must always remember that the things we encounter, even ourselves, are our constructions, that they do not reflect an independent reality, or that something about experience always resists appearing to us? Both Novalis and Nietzsche suggest that acknowledging this alienation allows a shift in the conditions for fulfilment, authenticity, and integrity, from certainty, truth, and access, to openness, questioning, and productivity. A self-affirming self is not one who is certain who she is, what her world is like, or what she must do, but one who is earnestly searching for the answers to those questions. Believing either that you already have the answers, or that final answers are what you must find, is the surest way to remain alienated.

Furthermore, this openness is the only way to incorporate the aspects of the self and the world that are necessarily excluded from any given realisation of these, for Novalis as one gradually incorporates apparently extra-individual parts of existence into one's self, and for Nietzsche as one shifts from one way of life, which develops one set of drives and capacities and sees the world in one way, to another. Finally, for both, reappropriating the capacity to create and interpret develops an important way of being that is denied when we imagine that the world and our selves are fixed realities. Both claim that interpretation is a fundamental human activity. According to Novalis, our vocation is to mediate

spirit to the universe through poetically interpreting it (see 2.5). For Nietzsche, destructive-creative processes, proliferation and negation, abundance and passing-away, are characteristic not just of human life but of life in general, and powerful expressions of the drives to expand, dominate, and overcome (see 6.4.2, 6.4.3).

This shift of focus from grasping a given role and place in the universe for human beings to world-creation or myth-making as the authentic or fulfilling human activity leads to a new way of dealing with the experience of alienation and fragmentation. Rather than giving new rules to live by, Novalis and Nietzsche provide tools with which to make one's own rules. Instead of specifying who one is and how one should act, they suggest coming up with one's own answers to these questions – answers that will allow one to love life and oneself. This takes account of scepticism regarding the authority of faith and reason as well as of the justifications for life that these provide: there is no authority that can give objective answers to our questions – indeed, there are no objective answers – and there never has been; it has always been us and we should embrace that power.

10.3.2 Interpretation and metaphysics

The last claim recalls a tension in Novalis' and Nietzsche's accounts that I have already flagged. This is the tension between their insistence on the impossibility of adequate knowledge about one's self and the universe and consequent demand to provide one's own interpretations of these, and the particular descriptions of these that they give. In chapter 2 I discussed Novalis' use of irony and association to resolve this paradox, and in chapter 9 the various attempts that Nietzsche's commentators have made to address the same problem. Here I am interested in the implications of this tension for these writers' attempts to undermine dualism. Both give descriptions of the self and its world partly in order to motivate the creation of new worldviews. Thus these descriptions contradict the static, atomistic, mechanistic, and dualistic account of discursive reason, presenting life as unstable and in a state of constant striving and activity and, most importantly, monistic.

Both suggest that overcoming alienation requires appropriating the creative activity that characterises human beings as well as everything else. For Novalis,

this prescription is justified because the construction of poetic interpretations enables the self-revelation of God, and so must take place in a universe that is the self-unfolding of God, allowing one to accept and affirm oneself as a part of this unfolding. He tries to resist providing a dogmatic account of the self and the cosmos, giving only an outline and a few, mostly figurative, examples, which by his own insistence are inadequate to their object. The audience must flesh out his account by applying it to particular situations, overcome its inadequacies, and discover – or rather, recreate – its truth for themselves. The objective is not a static, perfect interpretation of reality; what is important is creative engagement with the world through interpreting (see 3.7). Nonetheless, this project has metaphysical presuppositions: that the world is God, that through the things of the world God can and does achieve self-knowledge, and that human beings are part – in fact, the apex – of this process. It also claims that we have epistemological access, albeit limited, to these metaphysical truths. And it ascribes a purpose to the world and human existence, i.e., as the coming-to-self-consciousness of God.

Although Nietzsche denies the possibility of both metaphysical knowledge and the purposiveness of existence, as I described in chapter 9 he, too, makes apparently metaphysical claims that are important to his argument for the need to exercise creativity to affirm oneself. I have described the difficulties in trying to reconcile the latter with his insistence on the impossibility of knowledge of reality and, even more strongly, on the non-existence of a reality existing outside one's interpretations (9.2). The fact that we encounter difficulties in integrating this seemingly paradoxical set of statements in a coherent account both suggests the extent to which our worldview is permeated by the problem of how mind and world, representation and reality, relate to each other, and indicates Nietzsche's motivations in addressing this worldview. Nietzsche is troubled not only by the sceptical gap and existing attempts to bridge it, whether these are based on rationality or intuition, but also by the dualism that the gap presupposes. He wants to provide an immanent, one-world account of life that avoids both idealism and a realism that conceives the self or the mind as essentially separate from the things it encounters. He thus situates the self within a world that it contributes to

constituting, but that nonetheless escapes it in various ways, arguing that there is no world and no self other than the interpreted world and self that we encounter, but that these interpretations are not themselves transparent to us.

Novalis' struggle to subvert these dualisms is more comprehensible than Nietzsche's, but also less ambitious, not only stopping short of describing a monistic model of existence, but emphasising that such a description is impossible. Like Nietzsche, Novalis maintains that the human being is situated within the world, not fundamentally different from it, and that realising this is the way to overcome alienation. However, there remains both a metaphysical and a sceptical gap between subject and object, although these can be reduced by the mutual creative interplay of mind and world. Novalis' relatively clear idea of how to mitigate alienation is underpinned by a reality outside interpretations. The extra-experiential reality that he posits as a basis for his response to alienation is not a given, static realm of particular entities, as discursive reason presents it, but a dynamic, interconnected, non-substantial unfolding of God coming to know itself. Nonetheless, the real world has not dropped away from Novalis' account, as it has (albeit not smoothly) for the later Nietzsche; it has instead become changeable, hidden, and human-dependent (see 5.2.2).

Novalis' and Nietzsche's projects of myth-making are both motivated by the recognition of the human needs to realise ourselves, flourish, and make sense of and feel a degree of control over our lives. However, Novalis provides an objective ground for this recognition, a regulative ideal for one's interpretations, and a further motivating factor for the recreation of self and world in the form of an epistemologically (partially) accessible reality transcending interpretation. His audience can thus base their interpretations on Novalis' account – on the new myth that he creates. Nietzsche's scepticism is more thoroughgoing, and applies even to his own claims. The motivation for the self-creation that he advocates cannot depend on showing something about reality that can convince readers that his account is right. Accepting Nietzsche's diagnosis of the need for a new way of affirming existence and his prescriptions for how to do this is not a matter of determining whether his premises and arguments are accurate and sound, or even

of intuiting the truthfulness of his claims, but of a decision to adopt his approach as best-suited to one's needs and desires.

In sum, Novalis' claim that intuition mediates truth, even if imperfectly, retains for his account of myth-creation a form of objectivity, which both creates a basis for a communal adoption of myths and mitigates the sense of alienation from our (admittedly imperfect) ways of understanding and acting. Meanwhile, Nietzsche's more thoroughgoing scepticism denies that we can know anything about the world that we have not invented ourselves, exacerbating alienation in the critical distance we maintain from our beliefs and desires and in our sense of disconnection from others, and taking this to entail that communal myths threaten the independent creativity of the individual.

10.4 The new self

Nietzsche's attempt to get rid of the "real" world behind interpretations underlies a difference with Novalis in the way these writers think we create myths and new ways of being. I argue that Nietzsche pushes his rejection of the real world too far, resulting in his isolating account of affirmation. In 10.6 I show how this difference underlies the kinds of social relations that Novalis and Nietzsche think are possible. First, I look at the implications of the difference for how well the two writers undermine the dichotomies that they see as contributing to alienation.

10.4.1 Active and passive

For Nietzsche, the world we experience is characterised by conflict, as everything struggles to expand and dominate its surroundings. Affirmation comes from the feeling of increased power that results from gaining supremacy in a situation: from overcoming resistance and gaining what one wants. I described above (7.4.1) how this affects his model of freedom and power, particularly in relation to interaction with others. Although, as I argued there, Nietzsche subverts the active-passive distinction in some ways, his concept of willing, and consequently of self-affirmation, is based on dominance and submission, and in particular the interactions of individuals with each other resolve into dominator and dominated.

According to Novalis, this kind of model involves a misleading notion of freedom. As I described above (3.2), he maintains that freedom is attained not by unilaterally determining one's activity (including if this self-determination is construed as involving a multiplicity of largely unconscious forces rather than a single, conscious agent), but by undermining the distinctions between self and other and allowing the other to participate in one's actions. For Nietzsche, interpretation is a zero-sum game: the imposition of one's needs, desires, and ideas upon one's environment, prevailing as much as possible over the resistance that one encounters; for Novalis, it is participative, allowing that environment to speak through you and to act together with it to produce a common outcome.

Placed in this light, Nietzsche seems to repeat and indeed exaggerate an ideal of autonomy such as the one he criticises, presenting authentic selfhood as achieved through the domination of self and environment by a masterful, active individual. Furthermore, despite his attacks on the notion of the subject as inherent to the self or given, his ideal for human beings is, like the subject, an isolated individual, set over and against its world, defining itself as much as possible independently of the pressures of that world. Nietzsche subverts these notions in some ways. As we have seen, his allegiance to ideals of autonomy and power is more complex than his rhetoric of domination suggests (see 7.4.1), and he presents the individual not as given as such, but as a particular way of forming the self (see 7.2.3, 7.3). Nonetheless, as I have argued (7.3.1), his prescriptions for self-affirming creativity require self-determination as much as possible in isolation from the effects of others on one's actions and interpretations. The fact that this is impossible, due to the inescapability of our implication in social practices, is not for Nietzsche a reason to endorse the dissolution of our boundaries with others or to accept our embeddedness in society, as it is for Novalis, but a stimulus to repeated attempts to break with these social conditions.

10.4.2 Subject and object

As I have explained, the subject-object distinction is for both Nietzsche and Novalis essential to individuality and consciousness, and their responses to

alienation do not remove this distinction entirely. Both recognise that the human being now exists as a subject. They view this as a historical development, but whereas for Novalis it is due to the creation and unfolding of the world itself, for Nietzsche it is contingent on a particular form of social life. This suggests that Nietzsche should be in a better position to replace the subject with another way of life, but initially it seems to be Novalis who advocates the greater diminution of the subject status of the human being. Novalis explicitly presents overcoming alienation as an ongoing project of reducing the distance between subject and object, while although Nietzsche recognises that the contingency of this manifestation empowers human beings to alter it, he in fact demands that we affirm ourselves as the separate individuals as which we have come to exist, and even exaggerate this separateness.

Novalis wants to reduce to the greatest possible extent the dichotomy between self and other. He is driven by a regulative ideal of non-alienation, recognising the division between subject and object as valuable and indeed necessary to the self-reflection of the absolute, but suggesting coping with the alienation that it entails by partially overthrowing it (see 2.5). For Nietzsche, by contrast, we should appropriate this separateness, wrenching ourselves free as individuals from social constraints to appropriate experiences as free spirits and genuine individuals (see 7.3). Thus Nietzsche suggests coping with alienation by embracing and valorising that alienation itself.[368]

Undermining the passive-active distinction is part of Novalis' strategy for reducing the distance between subject and object, allowing him to envision the object as in fact part of the subject and contributing to its self-constitution. The poetic self is engaged in overcoming its boundaries with others, although always alienated from them to a degree. Nietzsche also finds one's separateness from others inescapably alienating. However, for Nietzsche, rather than reducing alienation, encounters with others exacerbate it, as one is unable to genuinely engage with them and must warp and deny oneself (and, presumably, the other) in order to make the attempt. This alienation cannot be overcome even in theory, and

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[368] GM III.14, KSA V pp.382–84; Z I Idol, II Philosophers, KSA IV pp.61–64, 132–35.

Nietzsche chooses, rather than trying to remove or deny it, to embrace it. Rather than trying to unify itself with the other, Nietzsche's self-affirming self is engaged in making itself different from others.[369]

The undermining of the subject-object dichotomy that Novalis advocates, including the possibility of genuine communication between differentiated entities, is based on his pantheism. The others in Novalis' account, or the object, are in essence already part of the subject, as absolute self, suggesting that the reduction of the subject-object distinction results from a projected elimination of the object as it is reabsorbed into the subject (at which point, of course, the subject also ceases to be). The self's ability to genuinely relate to, and eventually integrate into itself, other individuals and objects and events in nature is based on the same immediate access to itself as the mind's integration of the individual's non-conscious attributes, which allows it to (partially) know the object based on its identity with and creation of that object. We can genuinely engage with the rest of the world because it is part of us, and see ourselves reflected there because at root we are all reflections of the same absolute (see 3.3). In other words, Novalis' dissolution of the boundaries between self and other is based on the constitution of both together as artificial divisions in a greater self.

Nietzsche's denial of a "real" world outside human experience suggests that he undermines the opposition between subject and object by removing the object. However, we saw above (9.2) that he is concerned to avoid idealism as much as metaphysical realism. Rather, his attack on the subject modifies the ideas of both subject and object, presenting both as interpretations of activities that are more complex than we realise and that go on both within and outside what we think of as the subject. Both the self and its world are an opaque, multiplicitous, continually changing flux of conflicting drives and processes (see 6.4.1, 9.2.2). Thus while Novalis' poetic self undermines subjecthood by viewing itself as basically a subject but with porous and expanding borders, Nietzsche's conception of the self is distinguished from the subject, and made continuous with the object,

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[369] As I argued in 7.4.1, while Nietzsche talks of incorporating the other in constituting the self, this is best understood not as openness to others, but as their exploitation and reinterpretation.

not by its lack of boundaries, but by the contingent establishment of these boundaries through interpretation, which pulls it together into seemingly self-identical forms from the general flux of chaotic forces.

10.4.3 The self-creating self

For both writers, the recreation of self and world constitutes the self as a particular kind of non-given, self-creating self: a narrator or genius who makes something coherent out of otherwise meaningless events and experiences. As I described in chapter 9, for Nietzsche, to the extent that the self emerges as a unified being, this is an imposition of order and direction on an otherwise chaotic and meaningless set of instincts, thoughts, perceptions, etc. Novalis' self is also fragmented, but this dispersal is less fundamental than in Nietzsche's version in two ways. First, for Novalis the lack of cohesion we experience overlays a deeper unity that must be rediscovered or recreated rather than imposed for the first time. The divisions we encounter between objects and events are not essential. Nietzsche also claims that the categories we use in our interpretations of experience are not necessary, but rather than claiming that life is instead essentially a unity, he presents it as even more fragmented and multiplicitous than we imagine, and the appearance of unity as as much a construction as the appearance of division (see 6.4.3.1). Second, while Novalis suggests that the subject is a construction, his model of the poetic self maintains a core of intellectual activity that integrates other parts of the self into itself. Bringing the object within the subject is a question of creating mental representations of the extra-mental self and the world beyond, incorporating into consciousness aspects of experience previously encountered as outside it. Although the aim is to move away from the subject towards the absolute self, the subject – that is, it seems, the rational, conscious self, or the mind – is the point from which we start out and the one who performs the interpretations. As the interpretations become more "poetic", more and more of the object is incorporated into the subject – i.e., the physical world is represented in a spiritualised and intellectualised way within the mind – while the subject is expressed more and more completely in the object – i.e., the mind's understanding

and volitions are manifested in the world as actions. Thus Novalis sees the subject as a mind, as a unitary entity that has lost aspects of itself which it strives to retrieve and reincorporate by making them conscious.[370]

Nietzsche, meanwhile, breaks up the subject into a collection of drives and experiences, denies that these naturally harmonise, and maintains that any unity is a result, not of the conscious controlling will or articulating power that we imagine, but of a complex interplay of these drives in a struggle for power. Unlike Novalis, he attacks the notion that there is a pre-existing kernel of selfhood that performs the unifying action, or that appropriating aspects of experience requires making them conscious.[371] Through the suppression of many drives – conscious and unconscious – under the domination of another, a group of conflicting elements give the impression of unity. But the "subject" is a shallow and misleading characterisation of what is taking place. Interpretations emerge, not as the result of purposive (let alone consciously purposive) activity by the subject, however inclusive of input from the object, but from the chaotic interactions of conflicting forces (see 6.4.3.1). Thus Nietzsche presents subjecthood, as well as activity, not so much as refuted ideas, but as interpretations of things we do not understand, and so as ideas to which we are not entitled.

10.4.4 Mind and body

Both Novalis' and Nietzsche's accounts of narrative self-creation retain a distinction between mind and body but, like that between subject and object, subvert it to an extent. As I just described, Novalis undermines the two sets of distinctions together. For Novalis, our current over-identification with the mind means that supplanting the mind-body distinction requires incorporating bodily characteristics that seem to be non-rational and non-spiritual into the mind (see 2.5). The mind-body distinction is reduced as emotions, intuitions, and sensations cooperate with consciousness in creative interpretation.

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[370] E.g., "The poet is truly robbed of his senses – thus everything happens within him. He represents in the truest sense *subject object – mind and world*" (Novalis, „Fragmente und Studien," III pp.686 #671).
[371] GM 1.13, KSA V pp.278–81.

Consequently, while non-conscious elements of the self are taken up by the mind in creating interpretations, it still seems to be the mind that directs this activity. Like Nietzsche, Novalis presents the self and its world as constructed from otherwise seemingly unrelated incidents and experiences, but rather than emphasising the multi-layered and agonistic nature of this construction, and its consequent non-transparency, Novalis suggests that the full self-knowledge and self-expression of the absolute is achieved through a consciously articulated narrative. He even describes the ability to create such a thing as a characteristic of "genius", with its connotations of spirituality and intellectuation (see 3.4). The aim is a spontaneous manifestation of the unconscious, articulated in a discursive medium. However, since the unconscious is always, for Novalis as well as for Nietzsche, altered by language and thought, the mind-body distinction, like the subject-object distinction, can for Novalis be overcome only ideally.

Nietzsche more strenuously rejects the idea of the mind as a unitary agent that controls actions or even thoughts, but he identifies the same distance between consciousness and other, non-conscious elements of experience. He describes an organic connection of intellectual and conscious processes with the physiological, unconscious processes usually ascribed to the body, claiming that consciousness emerged from the needs of the human organism according to the same processes as physiological characteristics. However, there is still a gap between conscious experience and emotional, perceptual, and physical experience (see 6.4.1). In other words, as with the gap between the self as a whole and its world, alienation remains between the various drives or kinds of processes that make up the self at the various levels that we think of as belonging to the "mind" and the "body".

For Nietzsche, it is not that the body is more fundamental than the mind, or even that physical experience is more fundamental than intellectual experience (although he does sometimes describe the former as richer and more individual than the latter, or as a more primitive interpretation),[372] but that physical, intellectual, emotional, and other processes all contribute to the experiences that

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[372] Z I Despisers, KSA IV pp.39–41. Houlgate and Kofman investigate this issue in, respectively, *Criticism of metaphysics*, pp.51–57 and *Nietzsche and metaphor*, p.144.

hold themselves together as a bundle to constitute the self. While consciousness is alienated from physical processes and other non-conscious aspects of experience, these are not radically different and do not belong to separate worlds or systems of explanation, like the mind and the body or the soul and the body. They do not constitute a duality of immanent and transcendent elements, but an immanent multiplicity. The various aspects of the human being are distinct from each other, but should, and do, function together in a unified fashion to constitute a self.

10.4.5 Summary of 10.4

While both Novalis and Nietzsche undermine the dichotomies that constitute existence on prevailing interpretations, and while this results in both cases in a goal of recreating oneself to overcome these constructions, the outcome for their notions of selfhood are quite different. Nietzsche emphasises the fragmentation and opacity of existence, unsettling our conception of who we are and what the world is like. The self and the world that Nietzsche describes are not only dynamic and changeable, but radically ambiguous and vulnerable to dispersion. There is no foundation for self-interpretation, and our identity and relation to the rest of the world are always in question. Novalis situates us in a more familiar world: while he denies that the universe is essentially the way it appears in everyday experiences, and rejects the firmness of our borders with others and with the natural world, he allows that borders of some sort are inevitable and relatively stable while we live, permitting only gradual change to these and final dissolution only in death. The underpinning of our self-creating interpretation by a unifying absolute engaged in a process of self-reflection guarantees both the maintenance of our own identity as individuals and the possibility of real communication with others, while granting meaning to the dissolution of this individuality in death.

10.5 Transcendence, God, and death

We have seen how Novalis' account relies on a divine absolute underlying experiences. According to Nietzsche, such a basis in something transcending experience is fictional, and any solution to alienation that depends on it is not only

unsustainable, but devalues what is affirmed in relation to it, as Christian and post-Christian moral systems have devalued the universe and the human being that they valued in relation to God, being, and eternal life. For the later Nietzsche, not only is the spiritual absolute a fiction, but so is anything supposed to exist beyond one's experiences. I argue that Nietzsche's account, while requiring him to repudiate the former kind of transcendence, does not require him to dismiss the possibility of interaction with all elements beyond individual experience. In other words, his denial of the existence of anything beyond appearances does not entail the kind of problematic isolation that some of his rhetoric suggests.

To make this claim, I first argue that the communal aspects of Novalis' account survive without pantheism, pointing towards an immanent affirmation of life based on a shared construction of myth. These aspects, while conflicting with Nietzsche's statements about social relations and his will to power thesis, are compatible with the central insights of his critiques of morality, metaphysics, and epistemology. The comparison shows that Nietzsche was not required by his diagnosis of European nihilism to reject a social construction of meaning in favour of an individual one. If we do not accept Nietzsche's account of will to power – whether as a metaphysical or psychological principle, a hypothesis, or an ideal myth – we do not need to adopt his isolationist response to alienation.

10.5.1 Eternal life and the soul

The two most important aspects of transcendence that Novalis' response to alienation retains from the Christian tradition are God and eternal life. As I have described, his appropriation of these concepts has God becoming a pantheistic greater self and eternal life conceived as absorption in God, with no significant differentiation between the fates of sinners and saved (4.3.1, 4.3.3). If the notion of the soul appears in Novalis' work it is so altered by these changes as to be unrecognisable. Although in a sense the person continues after death, she does so only at the expense of personhood itself. Eternal life is not the resurrection of an individual to enjoy or contemplate God, but a complete loss of self and cessation of experience in a meaningful sense; the individual ceases to be in its reabsorption

into the absolute, its separation from which was only a temporary result of the unfolding of God in the world. In other words, the individual exists only insofar as the physical world also exists to distinguish it from other parts of existence, that is, from other parts of the absolute in material form.

10.5.2 Death and interpretation

In chapter 2, I argued that Novalis' understanding of death is central to his philosophy of affirmation. Novalis reconstitutes death as the site of unification with God, and part of life insofar as, like life, it is an aspect of the unfolding of the absolute of which we are a part. As a result, we should not fear death, but should view it as the fulfillment of the process of life in its progress towards unification.

Without the revaluation of death as a continuation of life in the infinite, Novalis' means of embracing death seems to fall apart, leaving it as a problem for affirming life. However, his account provides another means of affirming death that, while not as concrete or specific as the particular understanding of death that he advances, does not depend on either eternal life or pantheism. His account of poetic interpretation bases the creation of a better world on the ascription of meaning to experiences, in the form of a satisfying narrative (see 3.4). This suggests the possibility of affirming death in the same way as suffering or other adverse events: as with other experiences, we can take up death as one part of the experiences that must be strung together into a coherent, meaningful, and beautiful whole. In other words, Novalis' account, like Nietzsche's, allows that how we feel about death and whether we can affirm life in spite of it depends on what we make of it. There is evidence that Novalis recognised this potential of his thought. In a letter to Friedrich Schlegel less than a month after Sophie's death, he describes his attempt to cope with this event by revaluing it as part of a narrative of divine self-revelation: "[Sophie's grave] draws me ever closer, and this pull is at times my inexpressible happiness. [.... I]t is already fully clear to me what a heavenly accident her death has become – a key to everything".[373]

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[373] Novalis, „Tagebücher, Briefwechsel, Zeitgenössische Zeugnisse," in *Schriften* bd IV, p.219, Letter to Schlegel 13th April 1797; see also p.211, Letter to Caroline Just 28th March 1797, where Novalis resolves to view Sophie's death as providing an image of his better self.

Nietzsche, like Novalis, affirms death not just as potentially reinterpreted in an affirming vision of existence, but as actually reinterpreted in a particular way, in his case as a form of destruction that, like all change and passing away, is required for creativity and life (see 6.4). Death is the other side of the coin from proliferating life. For Nietzsche, therefore, death is not just another experience to be incorporated in a worldview and sense of self, but a condition of possibility for all experience. Without the premise of pantheism, which permits a similarly mythical re-imagining of death in Novalis' account as the reunification of all things in the absolute, the remaining possibility for an affirmation of death is thinner. Neither Novalis nor Nietzsche in fact just leaves it up to their readers to be strong enough to grant a positive role to death; both provide means of doing so, presenting death as necessary for life and, in different ways, for the creativity that underlies self-affirmation. However, these means can be seen as examples of possibilities for an affirming interpretation of death, rather than as necessary means of doing so. Both writers place the onus on the creator to construct a desired world out of her experiences, including the experience of death. Novalis' account thus points to a way of preventing death from forming an objection to life or undermining one's ability to affirm the self and its existence, not only in his own means of doing so, on the basis of a promise of eventual reconciliation with the divine, but in his claim that the way we are affected by experiences depends on an interpretive decision.

10.5.3 Transcendence, communication, and community

As I mentioned above, Novalis' pantheism both explains the need for reconstructing the self and the world and underlies this possibility by guaranteeing that these can mutually reflect each other. It permits collaboration in creating new myths, presenting language, the self, and human beings as analogous to each other, as manifestations of the same essence (see 2.3.3). This means that suggestion, association, metaphor, and imagination can issue in genuine communication between these, through their resonance or internal connection.

However, this resonance does not have to be based on either underlying unity or divine symbolism. Novalis' work contains the ingredients for an immanent account of genuine communication whether or not apparently separate entities are parts of the same greater self. The most important point about Novalis' claim that poetic activity integrates the activity of the other is not that the other is in fact already part of the self, but that genuinely listening to the other allows their point of view to be presented through one's own statements and actions.[374] It is as a result of this dialogue that a shared world is created, including a world that constitutes the self and its environment as not really separate. Although Novalis describes this as a recreation of an existing, underlying unity, such a pre-existing unity is not necessary for this to work. The creation of a shared world does not depend on a divine essence that unifies the co-creators, but on the ability to retrace and reconstitute each other's meaning. The world thus created may not be (in fact, will not be) experienced identically by each of the participants, but it can nonetheless be a world held largely in common.

Genuine communication with the other, or intuitive access to their experiences, can be explained without reference to God. Communication along the lines Novalis describes need not be underwritten by either identity with the other or an analogous structure for these or language based on their mutual constitution as revelations of God. We have at our disposal secular explanations for similarities between human beings and the ways they understand and relate to their world, for example that they evolved from common ancestors, or in response to similar conditions. The idea that we could, not perfectly but with reasonable reliability, trace back the meanings of another's gestures or utterances is not surprising, and does not need a transcendent explanation.

Perhaps more fundamentally, Novalis emphasises the importance of *mis*understanding for the possibility of creativity, communication, and freedom. His notion of symphilosophy depends on the gaps and mistakes in conversation and interpretation. The reason communication is so interesting and fruitful, for

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[374] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II p.438 #68/p.439 #68.

Novalis, is because of the ways in which we fail to transmit our precise meaning, leaving room for innovation and learning – and, indeed, freedom:

> The letter is only an aid to philosophical communication, whose real essence consists in the arousal of a specific train of thought. [....] The true teacher is a guidepost. If the pupil in fact desires truth then it requires only a *hint* in order to let him find what he seeks. Thus the representation of philosophy consists of mere themes – of starting statements - principles. It is only for independent friends of truth.[375]

In other words, the incompleteness of our access to the other is not alienating in a negative sense, but stimulating and liberating. We can be engaged in a joint project of meaning-making while aware that experiences are individual and only partially communicable. Novalis presents this difference – indeed this distance and inaccessibility – as a condition of possibility for freedom and knowledge, as well as motivating the desire to communicate, to encounter the other in a meaningful way – whether in another person, nature, or God. As Clare Kennedy puts it, "it is the impossibility of coincidence between discourse and the absolute which keeps alive the desire to think, read, and write. And only the unattainability of perfect communion between self and other can give desire its breathing space."[376]

Kennedy, along with Mary Strand and Alice Kuzniar, points out that accepting the difference and inaccessibility of the other both stimulates one's own self-development and is necessary for an engagement with others that respects their otherness, in particular the status of other human beings as independent subjects.[377] The resulting dialogue transforms both subject and object, allowing genuine interaction and mutual influence without dissolving the other's alterity. This reinforces my claim that Novalis sees the greatest good not as final

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[375] Novalis, „Logologische Fragmente [I]," II p.522 #3; see also p.523 #8, „Vermischte Bemerkungen," II p.470 #125, and my discussion in 3.3, 3.7.

[376] Clare Kennedy, *Paradox, aphorism and desire in Novalis and Derrida* (London: Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008), p.125. See also Ernst Behler, *German romantic literary theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.273; Newman, "Poetic process," p.28.

[377] Kennedy, *Paradox, aphorism and desire*; Kuzniar, "Hearing women's voices"; Strand, *I/You*; see also Pollack-Milgate, "Fichte and Novalis," p.339.

dissolution, in death, of the boundaries between self and other in reunification with the absolute, but as the movement between division and unification that occurs in community and dialogue (2.9.1). As Kennedy notes, "to see the Romantic writer as yearning for absolute plenitude is to underestimate the complexity of the Romantics' thinking on subjectivity".[378] This longing is not simply an expression of misery at a perceived lack, but a productive source of delight, freedom, and creativity. As Benjamin Crowe argues, the need for difference in order to create freely also means that concern for the other is built into the project of striving to attain one's better self, which, in Novalis' formulation is that of realising one's vocation as the embodiment of the divine.[379] Self-creation and self-development are possible only through encounters with a genuine other, as the recognition of distance and difference engender both longing for contact and the conditions for free self-creation and interpretation.

The productive nature of the gaps in our relationship with the other, as Novalis sees it, is the case not just for conversations with other human beings, but also for interactions with the rest of the world.[380] For Novalis, nature, while epistemologically and experientially available to human beings, has an essential mystery that resists final formulation and calls for the active engagement of its observers. For example, in *The Novices of Saïs* one novice finds a stone which the teacher places with others in a pattern that, clearly, has significance for the characters; however, Novalis does not reveal this meaning, leaving the reader to imagine it for herself.[381] On Novalis' account, experiences, including things in nature as well as the speech and gestures of other individuals, receive meaning for the individual who contemplates them as a result of reading them as signs. This reading does not provide an exact representation of what is there already, but is sensitive to what it encounters while constituting what is there by filling in the gaps. Real communication is for Novalis always a joint effort precisely because of the misunderstandings and lapses in precision that occur in the interactions

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[378] Kennedy, *Paradox, aphorism and desire*, p.126.
[379] Crowe, "Ethics of style", p.35.
[380] Novalis, „Anekdoten," II pp.573–74 #226.
[381] Novalis, „Lehrlinge," II p.81.

between individuals, or between the self and the objects and events that she encounters. There is no reason that this creative engagement with what we encounter needs to be underwritten by God or another form of unity.

10.5.4 Co-creating without pantheism

Not only is pantheism unnecessary for communicating or constructing a shared world, it is also unnecessary for the imperative to do these things. Although for Novalis allowing the self-reflection of the absolute is an important motivation, he suggests enough other benefits to justify this creative endeavour independently, and we can think of others. These include the enactment of freedom, a sense of fulfilment from exercising creativity and expressing ourselves, the possibility of improving our world, closer connections with others and the enjoyment of sharing a project, the chance to have a deeper understanding of our experiences, feeling ourselves to interact with and be situated within nature, and the ability to see the events of our lives as meaningful and desirable.

I am not suggesting that Novalis' account can be retained with a few modifications in order to avoid pantheism. The revelation of God is crucial to Novalis, even if some of his central claims do not require it, and his magical idealism is both a distinguishing feature of his work and untenable without a transcendent basis. The secular model that I have just described is not Novalis', but a new one built around his vision of the dynamic creativity that is possible in a dialogical community. Without pantheism and magical idealism, human beings can communicate along the lines Novalis suggests, interpret their world together and inhabit that mutually created universe, but they cannot acquire magical powers or speak with nature, as he describes. In a secularised account, images of conversation with nature imply, not the enlivenment of the universe by the divine, or the reading of natural events as symbols and manifestations of this divine, but the possibility of a responsive, sincere, and open engagement with experiences – one that does not force things into a mould but is attentive to their otherness, allowing them to appear in richer and more surprising detail.

10.6 Community and affirmation

Novalis' model of community is useful to a response to alienation, but it neglects troublesome aspects of communal life that are emphasised (even overemphasised) by Nietzsche. In particular, although his project begins with a recognition of the problems of suffering and death, Novalis does not devote attention to the suffering that human beings cause each other, glossing this issue, on the basis of his pantheism, as due to separation, resolvable through the overcoming of divisions that is fostered by his ideal for social relations (see 4.3.2). On the other hand, as should be clear I identify a pervasive problem in Nietzsche's decision to valorise and exaggerate, rather than reduce, the isolation of human existence. In his struggle to emerge from the shadow of Christian and post-Christian models, Nietzsche not only disposes of the transcendent as God and thing-in-itself, but by drawing the basis for affirming oneself back to individual experience also unnecessarily rejects from his account meaningful interaction with others.

10.6.1 Community and autonomy

Although both Novalis and Nietzsche identify the unthinking acceptance of prevailing interpretations of the self and the world as a source of alienation over and above the irreducible alienation that characterises human life, it is only Nietzsche who sees the fact that this interpretation is socially created as a reason why it is alienating. For both writers, it is alienating to take up the self and its world as if these are objectively given, and consequently to fail to engage one's creativity, but unlike Nietzsche, Novalis believes it is possible to be creative and modify one's interpretations and ways of being in a way that enhances one's individuality as part of a group. Indeed, as I have described, communication with others and openness to their experiences and interpretations is for Novalis an enabling factor for this process.

Although both Nietzsche and Novalis acknowledge that we are constituted within a group, for Novalis this communal self-construction is or can be authentic and affirming, whereas for Nietzsche it is damaging and restricting. As I described above, for Nietzsche we are constituted within a society, and must take

up the consciousness, language, individuality, and various sublimated drives, needs, and perceptions that we have inherited as the basis for interpretation (7.3.1). However, freedom and affirmation emerge through as much as possible creating without the influence of others on that activity, using these elements as the foundation for a construction that we perform independently. Furthermore, because we can never be completely independent of our social context, and because he thinks group needs and individual needs are largely opposed to each other, for Nietzsche we will always be alienated from ourselves and frustrated in our struggle for self-affirmation (see 7.2, 7.3.1).

As we have seen, Nietzsche presents group constructions of the self and its world as promoting the interests of the group largely at the expense of individual interests. I suggest that this is a mistake due in part to taking the particular social values he criticises to characterise social life in general. The repression, conformity, and paralysing pity that Nietzsche identifies in social life result, not from social life *per se*, but from belief in an objective metaphysical and moral reality and the possibility of adequate knowledge of these, and from fear. Nietzsche's story about the origins of group morality has fear of the other and a lack of trust of both the other's intentions towards oneself and one's own ability to endure or affirm what befalls one at the foundations of this morality.[382] But that these sentiments are at the basis of the particular form of social morality that has emerged as a result of a play for power by slaves does not entail that they are necessary foundations for socially constructed worldviews in general.

It is true that life with others requires one to modify one's behaviour and influences how one thinks and feels. However, Nietzsche's objections are not to the idea of constraint itself; he maintains that the modifications that ensue from constraint are important and valuable, and, furthermore, that self-command is essential for greatness or even coherent selfhood (see 6.4.3.1). His objections are to, first, the imposition of these constraints from outside with reference to an idea, rather than emerging organically from within the self; second, the use of a subject-metaphysics to bring about this modification; third, the particular values

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[382] BGE s.201, KSA V pp.121–23.

of democracy, pity, disinterestedness, and altruism that have been called for in western Europe; and fourth, the insistence that these particular modifications are objective and permanent (see 6.4.1, 7.3.2.1). Together, these result in feelings of guilt and self-loathing, the leveling of society, and stultification. But these characteristics are not essential to social forms of morality. As Nietzsche points out, there are many possible systems of morals for social life, and they do not all have these characteristics. Nietzsche himself lauds the Romans and the Renaissance period for their hardness, even cruelty, which he thinks led to what he considers their greatness.[383] In a more general vein, he claims: "In its measure of strength every age also possesses a measure for what virtues are permitted and forbidden to it. Either it has the virtues of *ascending* life: then it will resist from the profoundest depths the virtues of declining life. Or the age itself represents declining life: then it also requires the virtues of decline, then it hates everything that justifies itself solely out of abundance, out of the overflowing riches of strength. Aesthetics is tied indissolubly to these biological presuppositions".[384]

On Nietzsche's own account, self-affirmation and the accomplishment of great things are not precluded by a shared construction of meaning, but only by a construction of meaning that demands the sharing and/or mitigation of the suffering of others. I suggest, however, that there is also no reason that alternative worldviews that do not contain these premises and sentiments must be created by an individual rather than by groups. Recognising that worldviews are constructed rather than objective makes it possible to recreate them, regardless of whether we do so individually or with others. We could then move between these in order to realise different collections of drives and urges and exercise creativity. Moreover, it is not necessary to have complete consensus or perfect communication in order to create worldviews and systems of life communally. Nietzsche is thus wrong that the necessarily social nature of experience stifles individual creativity, even where we strive, not to mitigate the extent of our involvement with others' interpretations, but to recreate that reality together with others. As we have seen,

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[383] E.g., CW Epilogue, KSA VI pp.50–51.
[384] CW Epilogue, KSA VI pp.50–53; see also my discussion in 7.2.

Novalis suggests that myth-creation is possible on the basis of the freedom, creativity, and understanding that emerge in the gaps in agreement and communication. The meanings that the narratives we create have for different members of the group need not be identical, and can depend on individual experiences, associations, and capacities, but still be created together.

A less tractable basis for Nietzsche's opposing the individual and society is his idea of freedom and power as zero-sum games between individuals, who relate externally rather than participating in each other's activity. This pushes him to conclude that socially constructed worldviews are impositions on the individual that frustrate her power. The characterisation of life as an essentially competitive striving for dominance, or will to power, is central to Nietzsche's thought. A dialogical conception of power, freedom, creativity and self-affirmation is compatible with his critiques of metaphysics, epistemology, and morality (and, I propose, more successful at subverting alienation than the agonistic conception that he actually presents), but not with the will to power thesis.[385] The result is that Nietzsche's notion of community is conflictual, with one's self-realisation and flourishing basically opposed to the self-realisation and flourishing of others.

10.6.2 Transcendence and intersubjectivity

Underneath Nietzsche's insistence on the damaging consequences of group ways of being and the importance of independent efforts to self-affirm lies a concern to get rid of the transcendent, not just in the form of God, but also as the thing in itself, which he claims encourages an ideal of objectivity.[386] To counter this ideal and its damaging consequences, Nietzsche demands basing interpretations on one's own experiences, including perceptions, thoughts, feelings, needs, and wants, as individuals, without reference to the experiences of others (see 7.3.2.2). But the problems that Nietzsche identifies in faith in the divine or objectivity do

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[385] Richard Rorty claims Nietzsche's will to power thesis is incompatible with his perspectivism and therefore his politics, which Rorty construes as dialogical and dynamic (*Contingency, irony and solidarity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], p.106). While I also finds seeds of such a politics in Nietzsche, unlike Rorty I claim that we depart from the main lines of his thinking when we do see his politics as based, not on the will to power, but on the more democratic, other-directed possibilities for social interaction at which he sometimes hints.
[386] EH Preface s.2, KSA VI pp.257–58.

not necessarily apply to the acknowledgement of the value and importance of others and their perspectives for self-creation. Removing the transcendent, as either the divine or an objective reality, from interpretations, does not need to exclude others' experiences as co-constitutive of one's worldview, let alone present the other as something to be dominated or bent to our will. It only means that we need to avoid seeing the juxtaposition of our perspectives with those of others as potentially allowing objectivity, as well as avoid making claims about the metaphysical status of these others. According to Nietzsche, we have not solved and cannot solve the question of how we have epistemological access to others – whether other human beings or the other of the rest of the world. We simply cannot know things immediately, and our perspectives on things are necessarily subjective creations. Thus he claims that self-affirming constructions of self and world should be based on our experiences alone. But then, according to Nietzsche we have not solved the epistemological question regarding these either. They are as opaque as the rest of the world (see 6.4). We encounter them, like the rest of the world, for the most part unconsciously in complex and mysterious processes which are always interpretations through and through. The elusiveness of other people and the natural world should therefore not prevent us from taking interactions with these to be as necessary and valuable for the creation of new worlds and selves as the interactions that go on within the self.

10.6.3 Conflict and criticism

Nietzsche's description of the competition for mastery that occurs in social relations establishes three possible outcomes for interpersonal relations, all of which presuppose a fundamentally conflictual stance between individuals. These are relations of last men or neighbours, of dominator and dominated, and of friends (see 7.4.2). While he advocates the latter model, Nietzsche keeps the second in play in a number of ways: first, insofar as the relationship of friendship depends on an impasse in individuals' striving for dominance – i.e., the relationship depends on each individual aiming for a different outcome, in which she dominates the other; second, insofar as he believes that the weakness of most

human beings makes a society of friends impossible and an outcome of dominator and dominated the best to be hoped for; and third, as he believes, on analogy to the individual, that great things can be accomplished only by harnessing many drives (or individuals) under the direction of one dominant drive (or individual) (see 6.4.3.1), and therefore alongside his advocacy of friendship implies that a relationship of dominator and dominated is necessary for self-affirmation.

A society of friends such as Nietzsche advocates has several advantages. It recognises the gaps between one's interpretations and the interpretations of others, explaining the prevalence of frustrations, paranoia, conflict and potential for inauthenticity within society. Nietzsche is right about how common it is to feel misunderstood or to realise that one has misunderstood someone else, to have people misrepresent you, deliberately or not, to find oneself unable to explain experiences or ideas or to express how one is feeling, to not be listened to, to find oneself constrained or obscured by prejudices, stereotypes, or the particular needs and predilections of others – or to be guilty of doing this oneself – or any number of other such gaps. Furthermore, Nietzsche's account of friendship recognises the separate existence of the other, who has a different and independent outlook on things from the self. And it is dynamic, demanding criticism of ways of life and worldviews and recognising the tensions between these that lead to change. He admires and even suggests the possibility of encouraging differences of beliefs, ways of life, moral views, and in general of interpretations of experience, although, as I have argued, he does not generally advocate extending this encouragement to others but rather as relating to personal change (see 7.4.2, 11.4).

Nietzsche claims that friendship is dangerous and unstable, and there is something true in the claim that the balance of power between individuals is changeable and at risk. We might even want to agree that such instability is, or could be, desirable, as it could help avoid the entrenchment of particular systems of power. On the other hand, in Nietzsche's friendship this dynamism is fuelled by the desire to dominate, impose one's way of seeing things and acting on others, and ultimately appropriate and overwhelm the power of the other. To the extent that the other remains independent and powerful, this leaves us frustrated, even

while admiring their strength. Furthermore, we seem unable to do anything to encourage the encounter with friends: whether others can be friends or not depends on their own strength, which in our attempt to advance our own power we seek to undermine, rather than to foster. Finding a genuine friend and equal depends on luck, it seems: on the chance that two or more individuals, striving separately to enhance their wills to power and dominate everything around them, will be able to resist each other without being overwhelmed by or overwhelming their companion, despite their best efforts to do the former (see 8.3.3).

10.6.4 Cruelty and affirmation

Nietzsche's endorsement of the more dangerous human drives is an important acknowledgement of the possibility, perhaps inevitability, of oppression, violence, and cruelty in society (see 6.4.3.1, 7.4.2). As he points out, human beings can be vindictive and selfish as well as kind and generous. His account of punishment suggests how even the refinements of civilisation that sublimate egoistic or violent drives into supposedly altruistic and gentle forms are themselves outcomes of the exercise of such drives.[387] One's own observation readily confirms the widespread exercise of these capacities. At the least, Nietzsche warns against utopian visions of social life, reminding that we cannot expect social relations to fall easily or consistently into positive and fulfilling forms.

However, Nietzsche describes the dangers and violence of civilisation as not just inevitable, but as in many cases valuable. He views cruelty, destructiveness, egoism, and the desire for power as important parts of life that should be expressed and experienced. He does not claim that we should valorise only these at the expense of opposing tendencies; rather, we should allow all or as many as possible of the things that we are to emerge in their turn, under the creative and unifying direction of various dominating drives (see 6.4.3.1). Different drives may be useful for different things at different times – for example, Nietzsche claims that the cruelty of the Renaissance led to many of the accomplishments of that period and that all civilisation rests on violence and aggression, but he also

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[387] GM II, KSA V pp.291–337.

acknowledges that values of altruism and self-sacrifice have led to the development of complex, clever, and interesting forms of life (see 7.2, 10.6.1).

A modern response to alienation is likely to want to follow Nietzsche in acknowledging that some drives and urges forbidden under prevailing worldviews should be expressed and even endorsed.[388] Some find, however, that he goes too far in advocating accepting and endorsing all drives and tendencies, reflecting a concern with moral relativism.[389] The problem is not that his account entails that overturning existing moral systems results in an unrestricted unleashing of all drives and urges. We have seen how Nietzsche's conception of freedom rests, not on lack of restraint, but on the imposition of restraints upon oneself, which guide and shape one's drives and affects (6.4.3.1), and that the choice between submission to social ethics and complete lack of control is for Nietzsche a false dichotomy (7.3.1). As Frithjof Bergmann points out, the need for social morals to restrain savagery only holds if human beings are essentially egoistic and brutish, which Nietzsche denies.[390] Rather, this is how human beings seem to be according to a moral system that claims to be the only thing holding brutal urges in check:

> You long for the open heights, your soul thirsts for the stars. But your bad instincts too thirst for freedom.
>
> Your fierce dogs long for freedom; they bark for joy in their cellar when your spirit aspires to break open all prisons.
>
> To me you are still a prisoner who imagines freedom: ah, such prisoners of the soul become clever, but also deceitful and base.
>
> The free man of the spirit, too, must still purify himself. Much of the prison and rottenness still remain within him: his eye still has to become pure.[391]

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[388] For example, various forms of sexual repression or the repression, under the prevailing ethic of work, of the urge to do nothing, which Bertrand Russell famously argues for encouraging in "In praise of idleness" (in "In praise of idleness and other essays," [New York: Routledge, 2004]).

[389] Raymond Geuss, "Nietzsche and morality," *European Journal of Philosophy* 5 (1997): 1–20. Texts arguing against this charge include Michael Frazer, "The compassion of Zarathustra"; J. Keeping, "The thousand goals and the one goal: Morality and will to power in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*" *European Journal of Philosophy* 21:3 (2012): 73–85; Michaelis, "Politics"; and Nehamas, *Life as literature*, p.90.

[390] Frithjof Bergmann, "Nietzsche and analytic ethics," in *Nietzsche, genealogy, morality: Essays on Nietzsche's* On the genealogy of morals, ed. Richard Schacht, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp.85, 95.

[391] Z I Tree on the mountainside, KSA IV p.53; see also Z I Joys and passions; KSA IV pp.42–44.

In other words, the problem is that we have been taught by social mores to fear our urges, so that escape from social constraints seems to license total lack of restraint. However, Nietzsche thinks genuine liberation allows, not wild, uncontrolled indulgence of every urge and whim, but the possibility of imposing one's own ways of directing these urges, that is, of creating one's own rules for determining who one is and how one acts.[392]

Nonetheless, Nietzsche does not give any reason to expect or demand that the drives that emerge as dominant will be kind or considerate of others – hence the worry about moral relativism.[393] Which drives and needs determine the behaviour of the free individual is unpredictable, and depends on the individual in question. Nietzsche's pluralism does not permit establishing an overriding principle for ensuring respect for or the good treatment of others. Furthermore, his account actually rules out consideration of others as a criterion for establishing one's rule for oneself: As I have argued, his model of power entails that self-affirmation demands the attempt to appropriate and master the other as well as the self, and that protecting the autonomy of the other is detrimental to this project. Thus, even if Nietzsche's account does not entail violence against the other, it precludes taking concern for the wellbeing of the other as foundational for one's systems for understanding and interacting with the world. As I argued above (7.3.2.2), this allows the issue of self-affirmation to be resolved in an entirely self-directed manner, considering only the realisation of one's own drives to dominate and fulfil oneself as relevant to this project. The impact of one's actions on others is not relevant to whether realising one's drives in a particular way promotes one's affirmation of existence. The effect is exacerbated by Nietzsche's valorisation of the isolation entailed by his model, call to harden oneself to others' pain, and reliance on a zero-sum model of power and freedom. These factors, as

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[392] Indeed, only those who are capable of imposing self-rule should follow Nietzsche's advice and escape the yoke of social mores (Z I Creator, KSA IV pp.79–83).

[393] Questions about how a perspectivist can persuade others that she is right contribute to worries about relativism. For attempts to resolve this question, see 9.2.4 as well as Schrift, *The question of interpretation*, pp.164–80, 191; Anderson, "Truth and objectivity in perspectivism,"; Conway, "Perspectivism and persuasion"; Javier A. Ibáñez-noé, "World and creation: On Nietzsche's perspectivism," *Nietzsche-Studien* 28 (1999): 42–79; Owen, *Nietzsche, politics and modernity*, pp.33, 126–30; Siemens, "Nietzsche's agon with ressentiment," p.78; Welshon, "Skepticism, antirealism, and perspectivism"; Williams, "On making Nietzsche consistent, pp.123–27.

the comparison with Novalis shows, are not entailed by the diagnosis of alienation and the need for a new means of affirming existence.

10.6.5 A morality of harmony

A response to alienation that avoids endorsing cruelty towards others and the isolation promoted by Nietzsche's account should, I argue, adopt a model of myth creation closer to Novalis', which views the experiences of others as integral to one's own happiness and way of being. Novalis' account of community also rules out licensing cruelty and the oppression of others without giving a rigid or apparently objective moral code, or associating moral action with guilt. In other words, it avoids some of the negative consequences of universal morality that trouble Nietzsche without entailing relativism.

We have seen how for Novalis, separation and individuation due to the self-differentiation of the absolute is a source of alienation and unhappiness, and that the vocation of humankind is to work to overcome these divisions in realising divine unity. The latter becomes for Novalis a moral imperative, although in a particular sense of the term "moral". I described above (4.3.2) how Novalis removes the connotations of sin, guilt, and repudiation from the terms "evil" and "moral". For Novalis, moral action is action that overcomes differences and separation to realise a harmonious community that represents God on earth.[394] However, the inclusion of separation and difference within this unity is necessary for the realisation of the divine in the world, as well as for divine self-consciousness. As a result, the elements that confound unification are as important

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[394] Crowe, Sepasgorian, and Weder point out that Novalis identifies the moral idea with God, meaning that the goal of human beings is to become God, perceive God in nature, and thereby bring the divine into the world. They suggest this establishes a distance between God and world, or ideal and real, to be overcome through moral action (Crowe, "Visible universe", pp.130–36; Crowe, "Ethics of style"; Sepasgorian, *Der Tod als romantisierendes Prinzip*, pp.170–71; Weder, "Moral interest and religious truth", pp.295–98). As Weder points out, however, (and as I explain above), this distance is not a total separation or difference, but can be construed in terms of the distinction between a thing and its essence: "Novalis widens the concept of morality to something like the true essence of things, the higher order and harmony to be found in the whole of nature" (p.297). As von Molnár notes, this suggests a close relation, even identification, between moral freedom, poetic capability, and religious inspiration ("Umwertung", p.103). Weder sees this close relationship as not identical, maintaining that whereas the perception of aspects of the world as harmonious is moral, religion is when these harmonious aspects are understood as divine (Weder, "Moral interest and religious truth", p.301).

to the moral project as those that promote it. Thus while Novalis' goal of realising
unity seems diametrically opposed to Nietzsche's values of individuality,
diversity, and distance, especially when applied specifically to social relations, as
we have seen Novalis maintains that without individuality, diversity, and
separation there is no self-knowledge of the absolute. This means that
individuality and difference need to be maintained as much as possible, while at
the same time being brought together in relations that reveal their mutually
reflecting nature. The goal is not unification as chaos or undifferentiated oneness,
but as "a free interconnection of independent, self-determined beings" – in other
words, a community.[395] This requires the retention not only of divisions between
individuals (including between human beings and natural objects and events), but
of actual difference. This allows the self to retrieve aspects of itself that have been
lost and concealed in its always partial, and currently over-rational, self-
construction. Novalis uses gender difference, the gap between consciousness and
the subconscious, and the Orient (coded feminine, unconscious, sensual, and
mysterious) as the other to Western androcentric, conscious, rational, and
familiar, seemingly transparent existence. For Novalis, the self is only revealed
through what is other to it, and in particular through what is apparently alien and
different.[396] Novalis' goal is thus not unity as uniformity, but as harmony, as the
genial relation between diverse elements.

Novalis describes this situation of harmony, as well as the actions that one
takes in order to realise it, as "moral" or "virtuous", but he does not specify either
precisely what this situation will look like or what specific actions one should take
to bring it about.[397] In part, this is because the state of virtue is by definition
dynamic. Accomplishing the ideal of oneness would annihilate the differences

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[395] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub," II pp.454–56 #94/pp.455–57 #95; See
Crowe, "Ethics of style, p.34; von Molnár, „Umwertung", p.115.

[396] Strand, *I/You*; Kuzniar, "Hearing women's voices,"; Kuzniar, "Reassessing romantic reflexivity
– The case of Novalis," *The Germanic Review* (1988): 75–86; Seyhan, *Representation and its
discontents*, pp.78–79.

[397] According to Crowe, while Novalis' morality is indeterminate with respect to content when
conceived in terms of strictures of duty, his conception of God gives a determinate shape to his
ideal for human beings. Novalis' ideal for behaviour is conditioned by his view of God as a
"pattern of harmony" after which the virtuous individual can model herself and her society. Crowe
describes this modelling as a virtue ethics of style (Crowe, "Ethics of style", pp.32–34).

necessary for harmonious community, and it must therefore be realised through an infinite approach. Furthermore, the virtuous community can only be created freely, in dialogue with others.[398] It cannot be specified in advance and requires negotiating different perspectives to create temporary resolutions that express the beliefs, experiences, and lived reality of its various actual, concrete participants.

Novalis thus provides a picture of the means of affirming existence that has an overriding goal of harmony, and that is underwritten by the possibility of freedom, which relies on difference and distance. He thereby gives a moral principle that is broad enough to allow diversity, which requires creativity, freedom, dynamism, and difference in the development of new myths and perspectives on existence, but which nonetheless rules out establishing purely self-directed imperatives for action and ways of looking at the world. In other words, this model negotiates the tension that Nietzsche perceives between group morality and individual freedom and fulfilment without repudiating either.

10.7 Summary

Both Novalis and Nietzsche find that prevailing notions of epistemology, metaphysics, and selfhood contribute to an alienated humanity that has problems endorsing itself and its world. The new, narrative selves that they advocate in response to this alienation are creative, dynamic individuals that in various ways subvert traditional ideas about the self as given and as comprising dualities of mind-body, subject-object, and activity-passivity. Novalis' advocacy of continual self-creation is based on constructing new forms of epistemology and metaphysics that, while less dogmatic than either traditional religious or Enlightenment scientific accounts of sources of knowledge and the nature of the universe, more accepting of imperfection and error, and more demanding of openness and revision, nonetheless provide a relatively comprehensible new myth describing what the world and the human being are like. As such, Novalis' account is less

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[398] According to Strand, in Novalis' ideal for interpersonal relations, alterity is both recognised by the individual and changes the individual: "The desire of the other is recognised in a free relationship of communication", on the basis of "a shared humanity which does not exclude difference" (*I/You*, p.21). This results in breaking down boundaries between the self and the other (pp.24, 55). See also Pollack-Milgate, "Fichte and Novalis," p.344.

radical than Nietzsche's, which rejects all forms of knowledge, as well as the possibility of a real world, and insists on the revisability of all aspects of the new myths that we construct to make sense of our experiences.

I have argued that the strengths of Novalis' response to alienation, which can and should be retained for an immanent model of self-affirmation, are his accounts of communication and community. These present authentic, free, fulfilling, and creative interactions between individuals as possible not in spite of, but because of, distance and difference between individuals, epistemological inadequacies, and uncertainty about metaphysical reality. The need to reconstruct and retrace the meaning of the signs and statements that are given to us by others presents interactions with others as both the ground for freedom, creativity, development, and learning, and an important form of experience that must be taken up in constructing oneself and one's world.

On the other hand, Novalis' dependence on pantheism to undermine the above dichotomies, as well as for his models of communication, community, and the self, presents a problem for many modern readers. His model is also too optimistic, neglecting the presence and even potential value of violent, dark, or destructive elements in social relations. These are given full weight by Nietzsche, who presents human life, like the rest of life, as characterised by conflict, struggle, violence, and the quest for domination. In addition, Nietzsche's stress on the damaging consequences of faith in any particular interpretation of reality, and his demand that an affirmative worldview be constructed on the basis of our experiences alone, means that he constructs his account without presupposing either pantheism or any other metaphysical construction.

However, Nietzsche pushes his scepticism about epistemology and metaphysics and his emphasis on immanence to a rejection of the participation of others in our self-affirmation, and concomitantly overemphasises the value of the dangerous aspects of humanity. He places the individual in confrontation with society, concluding that in order to affirm life we must become hard and self-sufficient enough to celebrate our isolation. His ideal for social relations is based on the endorsement of the struggle for individual domination, rather than on

dialogue and participation in each other's liberation. I have argued that this outcome is neither entailed by a critique of prevailing forms of epistemology, metaphysics, morals, and social relations, nor on a call for immanence in our attempts at self-affirmation. Rejecting God and the thing in itself as factors in the construction of the self and its world does not entail that the encounter with genuine others needs to be irrelevant to the attempt to affirm ourselves.

In the next chapter, I argue that a plausible and successful response to modern alienation must depart from both Novalis' optimistic pantheism and Nietzsche's sceptical individualism to reconcile a creative, interactive model of community with a stress on immanence and a recognition of the potential for danger and violence in social relations.

Chapter 11 Conclusion: Guidelines for an immanent affirmation

<u>11.1 Introduction</u>

The concerns of this thesis have so far been mainly historical and critical, comparing Novalis' and Nietzsche's attempts to create affirmative visions of existence in the face of alienation, death, and suffering and analysing their relative strengths and weaknesses. In this final chapter, I suggest guidelines for a positive project on the basis of my findings. I sketch the outline of a response to alienation that takes up the strengths of each writer and avoids their pitfalls. Their different orientations to the possibility of knowledge and to the transcendent, which co-exist with significant similarities between their work, mean that in many cases problems in one account are resolved by the other. Thus the comparison of the two writers already delineates the shape of a stronger response to alienation.

I suggest that such a response must have the following characteristics: In the first place, the primary purpose of such a response is to cope with suffering, death, and transience, so it must point to a means of doing this. I propose that this should be, as Novalis and Nietzsche suggest, the creation of myths or narratives for giving value and significance to experiences. As these writers also indicate, the response must be immanent, ascribing an intrinsic, not merely instrumental, value to experience. It should be explicitly an interpretation of experience rather than a supposedly objective account of a reality transcending experience. Like in Novalis' account, I propose, this model should be constructed and lived with others, but like Nietzsche's it must recognise the inevitable potential for abuse, violence, damage, and inauthenticity in social relations; however, not to the extent of celebrating these or denying that they can and should be struggled against. Finally, such a model should give an idea of how it could be practiced.

<u>11.2 Suffering and death</u>

As both Novalis and Nietzsche recognise, the prevalence of pain and inevitability of death are potential problems for loving life. Life, as these writers are continually, explicitly aware, is not necessarily straightforwardly desirable and

easy to endorse; the world resists us, causes us pain, and always eventually destroys us. Fear and anxiety, as well as delight, are thus appropriate responses to existence. The decision to live, to want life, to see it as valuable, is not a foregone conclusion. The problem of alienation is at root the sense of horror and displacement we experience as a result of having no means of overcoming this fear and anxiety to feel at home in a world that we want. A response to alienation must, most basically, establish such a means.

Both Novalis and Nietzsche suggest that, if we are not to despair, experiences of suffering and death must be incorporated into a story or myth that presents them as valuable, or as integral parts of a whole that is valuable (see 6.4, 10.5.2). It is no use closing our eyes to these experiences or pretending they are aberrations that can or should be avoided. Both accounts suggest that the precise form of the myths used to do this is not important, as long as they value life while recognising the presence of suffering and death.[399] Events are always interpreted in order to be experienced, but tragedy, resistance, pain, and finitude inevitably erupt into these experiences and must be addressed somehow. We can choose whether to interpret these in a way that allows them to be valued or to be part of a whole that is valued, or in a way that presents them as horrifying, confusing, and needless intrusions: things we should try to avoid and that, if we cannot, devalue life. In other words, in a world without objective structures for making sense of things, an interpretive decision about the meaning of pain and death is needed to overcome the alienation and despair that they otherwise engender.[400]

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[399] Novalis and Nietzsche both present their own myths for reconstituting death and suffering, while outlining tools for their audience to create their own. Novalis' affirming myth is a pantheistic account of the individual as part of an absolute self that longs for both self-knowledge and reunification, reconstituting death as part of the process of self-revelation of God; Nietzsche's is a claim about the foundational importance to life of a drive for creative overcoming, which requires the continual change and destruction of individual entities in order to realise what is most beautiful and desirable in life. Both myths incorporate suffering and death in an interpretation of experience that shows them to be desirable.

[400] I do not mean to claim that such a decision would be an easy process or one that can be fulfilled in the blink of an eye, nor that it will always be possible for everyone. It might also be a process that can be carried out to various degrees: one might be able to partly revalorise terrible experiences, or to revalue some but not others. However, there do exist practices for helping encourage such shifts in attitude: for example, cognitive-behavioural therapy is one way that individuals teach themselves to experience events and respond to them differently.

11.3 Immanence

Both Novalis and Nietzsche see a need to grant value to life without relying on an objective picture of what that life is, and attempt in different ways to assert the intrinsic worth of the world we experience, without reference to anything outside it.[401] I have argued that it is not clear that either attempt succeeds fully in excising elements transcending experience in order to affirm life immanently (5.2.2, 9.2). Nonetheless, these writers plausibly identify serious problems in trying to use a two-world model to affirm experience. They suggest that attempts to affirm life on a dualistic basis fail both because they present the world and the self as fragmented and alienated, and because they give value to the things we experience only instrumentally, on the basis of their relationship to the transcendent – whether this is God, a heavenly realm, or a thing in itself. As a result, all or parts of the things that we actually experience are devalued by contrast (see 2.3, 6.4.1), and the alienating divisions that a dualistic model constructs makes it hard to understand how aspects of the world, including the self, relate to each other.

Consequently, the new myths we create should be immanent, that is, they should not posit a gulf between levels of experience, such as the mind and the body, or between experience and something beyond it, such as between the physical world and the spiritual, rational world. This avoids both problems in explaining how these levels interact with each other, and the devaluation of one or both that the division often seems to entail.

However, Novalis and Nietzsche both indicate that avoiding dualism does not entail reducing experience to either purely mental or purely physical events. They maintain that there are various kinds of experience (conscious, unconscious, cognitive, emotional, sensory, perceptual, volitional, etc.), but that these are not separated by a gulf; rather, they are continuous, even if often largely opaque to each other. For Novalis, the unconscious is intrinsically active and rational and can gradually be made conscious. Nietzsche claims that various kinds of

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[401] For Novalis, as I argued above, the divine underwrites the value of life, but he attempts to construe it as immanent to the world and human experience, as the hidden nature of the world and partially accessible to experience in intuition; for Nietzsche, nothing exists besides perspectives, and these should be affirmed (or not) on the basis of their intrinsic worth as beautiful and powerful, rather than their status as either divine or "good".

conscious and unconscious interpretive activity emerged in response to the same needs for dominance and survival, and manifest the same fundamental activity of interpretation. A response to alienation that avoids the pitfalls of dualism need not follow either of these models, but should recognise the unity of experience, that is, that although the kinds of experiences we have are often unlike each other, and not fully commensurate with each other, they take place in the same world.

Both Novalis and Nietzsche maintain that much of what we experience is hidden to consciousness and cannot be perfectly translated into discursive concepts. This is not to say, however, that different kinds of experience are either irremediably separate, belonging to different worlds, or that they cannot inform each other. The gaps and inadequacies in translating experiences do not cut them off from each other, but only make the outcome of their interaction indeterminate. In other words, the fact that they cannot recreate each other perfectly means they can engage with and appropriate each other in multiple possible ways. The way we understand our experience of pain, for example, or the emotions with which we respond to our thoughts about death, are not determined, but can be influenced and shaped by decisions about how to take up and interpret these experiences.

An immanent model of experience allows life to be loved despite pain and death, without reference to an external standard, by maintaining that experiences admit multiple possible interpretations. This allows us to work to affirm life (or not) by integrating these in a form that presents the whole as valuable (or not). Without a transcendent basis for justifying existence, life must be loved on the basis of interpretive decisions about the relationships between the various kinds of experience that constitute human beings and their world. As I describe below (11.5.1), my account suggests that such decisions will be most convincing when they involve others, that is, when they are communal efforts that develop over time, rather than spontaneous, individual accomplishments.

11.4 The new myths

I propose that a response to alienation should also take up Novalis' and Nietzsche's claim that these interpretive decisions must be made explicitly, that is,

that the new myths we create should be recognised as such. Novalis and Nietzsche point to serious problems with the demand that life be affirmed on the basis of an objective understanding of what it is. They level compelling criticisms at existing epistemology and metaphysics, with their emphasis on objective truth, complete discursive or conscious articulation of experience, and fixed and given realities. These, they argue, are impossible demands that, when we insist that they can be or have been met, miss much about experience and the nature of the self, stifle creativity, enforce uniformity, and finally leave human beings in a universe without justification (see 2.3, 6.4.1).

The interpretations of experience, including the self, that Novalis and Nietzsche advocate are by contrast self-critical, aware of their own inadequacy, and inviting of revision, refuse to posit a rigid metaphysical picture or insist on the possibility of firm knowledge, thus avoiding the damaging consequences of dogmatic metaphysics and epistemology. This process of self-criticism and revision shifts the focus in responding to alienation away from finding firm answers that can command consensus towards questioning, creativity, interpretation, and continual revision of answers. In short, these are strategies for endorsing life without recourse to authority or firm foundations and, I suggest, should be adopted by a productive response to modern alienation. Such a form of endorsement is appropriate for a postmodern age, with its tendency to be sceptical of knowledge sources, recognise the validity of multiple, often conflicting, viewpoints, and deny inherent meaning to events.

This self-reflective, open, and questioning attitude also has a number of positive implications that contribute to a joyful stance towards existence. It encourages development and change, especially self-development, and diversity, allowing a richness of experience that could compensate for the loss of a sense of necessity for any particular way of being. It should entail allowing, or even encouraging, alternative viewpoints and ways of life in others as well as oneself, reducing the amount of stifling conformity that we enforce upon ourselves and others. This proliferation of interpretations should also stimulate dialogue, inviting others, with viewpoints and ways of life that to varying degrees differ

from one's own, to participate in creating new interpretations.[402] It thus provides a further impetus to self-development, but also a potentially valuable means of being together and facilitating each other's freedom, creativity, and development.

Endorsing the self-aware creation of interpretations through which to encounter events also demands active engagement with experiences, rather than a passive reception of apparently given interpretations, which potentially encourages not only independent thought and innovation, but also resistance to authoritarianism. Potentially, this resistance applies not only to the authoritarian tendencies of those who seek to impose their views on one, but also to one's own authoritarian tendencies, as the self-critical, ironic nature of one's attitude invites modesty in maintaining the rightness of one's worldview and way of being.

11.5 Community

I have described the very different models of community and its relation to the individual presented by Novalis and Nietzsche, as well as some of their insights and failings (see chapters 3 and 7). My investigations suggest that the ability to affirm existence and overcome alienation is enabled by particular forms of social relations. In this section, I outline some characteristics of a community that allows the individual to affirm herself in the face of modern alienation, and suggest how we might begin to bring such a community into being.

11.5.1 Communal construction of meaning

I have argued that from Novalis' work one can derive the possibility of genuine communication and being with others, on the basis of the freedom and imaginative creativity enabled by the gaps and mistakes that inevitably occur in encounters with others (5.2.3). Even without pantheist underpinnings, the social construction of worldviews and ways of being need not lead to the kind of stultification, inauthenticity, and alienation that Nietzsche suggests it does. As Novalis recognises, the interpretive activity of others provides conditions of possibility for the freedom to creatively interpret experiences and construct the

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[402] I have argued that Novalis, but not Nietzsche, takes up these implications (3.7, 7.4.2).

self. I suggest that a response to alienation should recognise the shared nature of the myths we create and through which we encounter the world, but also the freedom of the individual to influence the shape that these myths take.

Nietzsche finds that the need for shared constructions of experience in order to feel at home in the world is a sign of weakness (see 7.4.2). However, both he and Novalis suggest that while unreflective acceptance of social constructions is stultifying and damaging, creative engagement with them is necessary for freedom, authenticity, and self-fulfilment.[403] The difference is that Nietzsche focuses on the barriers to freedom that exist in the bonds of convention, whereas Novalis emphasises their power to make us feel at home. Despite the self-critical, ironic, and continually self-revising nature of the myths that Novalis, like Nietzsche, advocates, their intersubjective nature – the fact that they are partly given to us by others – means that we experience them not as fragile inventions that it is hard for us to commit to, but as solid, real (though changeable) structures within which we are situated. In other words, we can have faith in interpretations of experience, encountering them as real rather than as fantasies or hallucinations, because of their shared nature. The ability, as Novalis describes it, "to act towards imaginary objects like real ones, and also to treat them like these"[404] is not performed in isolation but enacted together with others.

This shared world should, however, be the foundation for creative engagement with experience, rather than taken up as given. The social meanings with which experiences are invested are not just constraints on an individual, but materials that she shapes and gives back in an altered form. This is the foundation of freedom, as not only Novalis, but also Nietzsche, recognises, and the means by

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[403] Like Nietzsche, Novalis recognises that the extent to which one can be free in creating new ways of life depends on one's concrete conditions: "Everything that surrounds us, the daily incidents, usual relations, habits of our way of life, have an uninterrupted, even unnoticeable, but most important, influence on us. However beneficial and expedient this cycle is for us, insofar as we are contemporaries of a determinate time, members of a specific corporation, nonetheless they hinder us in a higher development of our nature. Divinatory, magic, truly poetic human beings cannot emerge under conditions that are like ours" („Logologische Fragmente [II]," II p.533 #33). The two writers resolve this tension differently, however. For Novalis this shows that we need to work to foster a society more conducive to self-liberation, whereas for Nietzsche it means we need to struggle to – to the extent that it is possible – independently appropriate our social conditions.
[404] Novalis, „Vermischte Bemerkungen," II p.418 #22.

which we can change our world to better suit our needs, drives, desires, beliefs, and perceptions. Because they occur in dialogue with others, these changes will be incremental and iterative rather than revolutionary, but they are, nonetheless, expressions of freedom and creativity and means of appropriating what is given to us and reconstructing it to better meet the need to endorse and affirm experience.

11.5.2 The darker side

However, this process of dialogical engagement with others is also a potential source of danger. Novalis' account shows that the interaction between the individual and others is not necessarily a zero-sum game, but is more basically a responsive, free engagement. A confrontational, crushing interaction is only a particular (perhaps dysfunctional) form of this relationship. Nonetheless, it is a possible outcome for the interaction between individuals, and an account of human experience that attempts to respond to alienation needs to address this possibility. I propose that a model of a society geared towards self-affirmation should retain Novalis' optimism about the possibility of genuine, liberating relationships, but with an eye for the social dangers that Nietzsche identifies.

Novalis' notion of community can survive without his pantheism, but removing a benevolent God as the basis for all things puts the outcome of such joint interpretation at greater risk. Pantheism underlies Novalis' claim that even apparently sensuous or egoistical drives are intrinsically rational and spiritual, which, while not ruling out conflict or unpleasantness, implies that things tend towards goodness and cooperation. Although Novalis' pantheism does not guarantee progress towards greater unity, merely positing it as a goal towards which we ought to work, the underlying unity and goodness of the world is a reassuring safeguard for a certain degree of mutual understanding and care.

Nietzsche, by contrast, presents social relations as the playing out of competing drives to dominate and master, and hence unstable, confrontational, and always at risk of becoming tyrannical. In addition, he sees the inadequacies of language and consciousness as making interactions with others generally alienating. Nietzsche is clearly right that miscommunication and

misrepresentation, and indeed violence and oppression, occur in society, and observation suggests that the tendencies to these things may even be always present in social relations. However, a dialogical notion of myth-creation such as I suggest taking over in modified form from Novalis can recognise this possibility. In such a model others reflect our selves, actions, and views of the world back to us in changed forms upon which we work further, creating ourselves and our environment not in isolation but as a joint project with others. This has the potential to go badly as well as well – we do not completely control the environment we help create. Our influence on the worldviews taken up by the community may not be as great as we would like, with the result that we may feel powerless and isolated. We may experience resistance to or even repression of our attempts to promote our interpretations of experience. Furthermore, even where this is not the case, the extent of the correspondence between our vision of the world and those of others will vary. Some people will seem to be kindred spirits, who nearly understand us, who share our values and see the world in a similar way, and it might be easy to feel ourselves engaged with these individuals on a communal project; others will have fundamentally different experiences, and it may be hard to find a connection with them in order to begin a constructive dialogue. The way we exist as individuals in society is also not fully under our control: others understand and interpret our actions in ways we did not anticipate, and we find ourselves reflected and shaped in these unintended ways. We can have ourselves given back to ourselves by the other as unpleasant, disempowered, overbearing, or in any number of forms we dislike as well as as pleasant, loved, powerful, and generous. Finally, as Nietzsche points out, human beings are capable of cruelty and violence as well as kindness, and we must negotiate the presence of these tendencies as well as those that are gentler. All of these possibilities can be acknowledged in an account of dynamic, dialogical, communal myth-creation that recognises the possibility for human cruelty.

A viable response to alienation needs to recognise both the darker side of the self and its vulnerability. I suggest that a dialogical model of human interaction can do this, while granting the individual the freedom and power to

shape her experiences and interpret them in a way she can endorse. Like all experiences, we have a choice about what we do with the miscommunication and violence that we encounter. Nietzsche's suggestion that we should harden ourselves to painful experiences and alienation, while abandoning those too weak to do so to their fate, is only one possible response and, I have suggested, not the most conducive to self-affirmation (see 7.3.2.2). Taking seriously Nietzsche's claims about the dangers of denying and suppressing our darker side does not mean that we need to adopt a worldview that licences the indulgence of these drives without attention to their affects on others. On Nietzsche's account, creating the self and the world that we want requires self-discipline, as one expresses, suppresses, and sublimates various characteristics in a chosen direction or configuration. Creating a world communally similarly involves decisions about which characteristics one wants to foster. I suggest that in making these decisions one should consider how they will shape possibilities for ways of life for others, recognising that the decisions of others are important conditions for one's own interpretations. I have argued that freedom and self-affirmation emerge, not in individual interpretation, but through the joint creation of a shared world. Fostering these values should involve encouraging the development of as many people as possible to be capable of this self-discipline. This goal provides grounds for a reflective self-creation and activity that works with social constraints to provide the conditions for freedom and creativity for both oneself and others.

11.6 Praxis

11.6.1 Iteration

Life in society does not necessarily provide the conditions of possibility for a free, dynamic, and dialogical engagement with others and their worldviews. Novalis recognises the pre-eminence of onesided reason, individualism, and "Philistinism" as occluding this possibility, while the impetus for Nietzsche's attempt to enable self-affirmation is a society in which supposedly objective values constrain creativity and stifle individuality – and we can find our own examples of repressive social orders. The socially mediated world that we take up as a starting

point for realising creative freedom and affirming ourselves may be more or less conducive to these efforts. I argue that the self-affirmation of the individual is better furthered within a community of creative selves in dialogue than alone. The question is, then, how we can foster the development of a dynamic, dialogical, mutually supportive, free, creative, and self-critical society – and especially how we can do so in a way that is itself open to the responses of others, non-coercive, and encouraging of difference.

As Novalis suggests, this is an iterative process, and as Nietzsche indicates, one that is always at risk of going in an opposite direction. It does not implement a model conceived abstractly, but is a repeated response to the changing concrete situation in which one finds oneself, as one seeks opportunities to develop and tries to create such opportunities for others. Depending on where and when one lives, these opportunities may be easier or more difficult to find, but I propose that the ineradicable differences between individuals and gaps in communication mean that there is always room for at least some small expression of freedom in one's appropriation of social structures. The appropriation and reappropriation of these structures is the means by which we can change them to better encourage freedom and affirmation. The society that fosters these things is not created in finished form by imposing a particular worldview or way of being on others, but is always changing, emerging through give and take with other positions.

11.6.2 Tyranny and servitude

As a dialogue, this process requires listening to others as well as making oneself heard, taking on board and responding to others' positions as well as demanding that they do the same to yours. One must sometimes restrain one's exercise of power in order to hear others, as well as sometimes struggle to be heard oneself. Which course of action in any given situation fosters dynamism and openness varies depending on who one is and who the others are with whom one is interacting. It is both possible to err in determining which approach is called for, and difficult sometimes either to restrain oneself or to speak up as appropriate. Freedom is, as Nietzsche describes it, always "five steps from tyranny, near the

threshold of the danger of servitude."[405] The trick to fostering this freedom for oneself and others, I suggest, is learning to recognise whether one is currently in more danger of being oppressed or of oppressing others.

The dangers of sliding into either tyranny or servitude should not discourage working towards a world that enables joy and freedom. These dangers are inherent in social interactions, and one's actions, whether consciously or not, always create or preclude opportunities for the self and the other to be creative and self-affirming. Recognising the dangers, as well as the nature of the goal, does not mean that one will not misjudge encounters and sometimes let oneself be walked all over or walk all over others. It does, however, give both a reason and an interpretive structure for attempting to traverse the fine line between these outcomes: that is, that one's own freedom and self-affirmation are best enabled by a dialogical community engaged in the construction of a shared world.

11.7 Concluding remarks

My account suggests that the loss of God as the foundation for the universe need not be isolating or depressing, and that an immanent affirmation of existence is possible on the basis of a self-aware, self-critical, creative community. The freedom that emerges with the loss of objective structures for making sense of life – for determining who we are, how we should act, and what will become of us – does not mean that there are no constraints on our actions. Rather, since the new myths that allow us to feel at home in the world and love life can only be created with a community, our actions should be guided by the goal of creating a society that fosters the creative engagement of individuals with their experiences and the experiences of others. Life, particularly social life, does not necessarily tend towards this outcome, and there is always a danger of constraint, repression, and violence in social relations. Nonetheless, we have the power to decide how we take up the conditions that are given to us, and to change them in greater or smaller ways to allow ourselves and others to interpret them as joyful and desired.

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[405] TI Expeditions s.38, KSA VI p.140; see also A s.2, KSA VI p.170.

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