

## Nietzsche on Life's Ends John Richardson, NYU

### 1. Introduction.

My overall topic is Nietzsche's notion of life [*Leben*], and in particular how he uses it to guide or correct his and our values. I'll try to say what Nietzsche means by 'life', and by 'value'—and will examine how he relates them. An obvious answer, and the start of a more adequate answer, is that he means many things by 'life', and even by 'value'. So there is an unavoidable complexity to the topic. The challenge will be to bring this multiplicity into some kind of perspicuous order.

Now I think life is one of the topics those working on Nietzsche in an analytic way tend to avoid. There are, after all, some topics and arguments in Nietzsche that are noticed better by beginning readers. Those who go on to treat him philosophically, i.e. argumentatively, tend to discount these topics and place them on the periphery of his thought, either because: a) these views look like embarrassing weaknesses, or b) they at least look useless as arguments—they seem dead weight in his theory. Life is one such topic—and in particular the way Nietzsche so often uses it to support or justify his evaluations.

I think beginning readers better notice the importance of this argument. Indeed I think it is Nietzsche's principal justification for his values: life gives the main criterion by which he carries out his 'revaluation of values', and the fact that life supplies it is what justifies that criterion. 'Life' is the clear fulcrum of most of his defenses of his values, and only such judgments as a) and b) can explain the widespread neglect of the topic.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, contra those judgments, I think that this argument has some merit—or (backing off a long ways) at the very least some interest. Although early readers can't

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt [1991, 111-30] is one exception who stresses and examines Nietzsche's argument from life to values. See also Conway [2006]. May [1999] develops how 'life-enhancement' is Nietzsche's standard for evaluating values, but doesn't examine just what life is. The same is true of Reginster [2006], despite his focus on 'the affirmation of life'. Schacht [1983, 232-53] treats at length Nietzsche's notion of life, and more briefly the role of life in supporting values [354-6, 395-8].

well say quite why, I think they aptly feel some force in this argument. So it shouldn't embarrass us as much as we (sympathetic) interpreters might think.

Given its key role in supporting his values, it's not surprising that the idea of life is constantly present in Nietzsche's writing. It appears again and again at crucial points. The most dramatic of these is at the climax of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, when Zarathustra marries Life, with the aid of his thought of eternal return; I'll review these passages shortly. But the idea of life already plays an important role near the start of his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which develops how art 'made life possible and worth living' for the Greeks, in the face of their tragic view that it's 'better never to have been born'. The way tragedy is life-affirming despite this negative judgment is a crucial point of the book. This is confirmed in the later-added 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism', which famously says that the book's task was 'to look at science in the optic of the artist, but at art in that of life' [BT.ASC.2]; it adds later that the book was burdened with the question 'What, seen in the optic of life, is the significance of morality?' [4]

The idea of life remains important in the middle, 'positivist' works,<sup>2</sup> and then all through Nietzsche's maturity. He counts himself among the 'advocates of life' [*Fürsprecher des Lebens*] [WP116 [1888]].<sup>3</sup> The idea that life is/gives the standard for his revaluation is quite standardly presumed and relied on.<sup>4</sup> We'll look at many quotations as we go. Indeed Nietzsche even composed music for a 'Hymn to Life', to words by Lou Salome (as he mentions in EH.iii.Z.1). Of course our main interest will be in the arguments he wants to turn on life. But I also want to do some justice to his poetic and affective relation to it.

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<sup>2</sup> Life as criterion is embedded in the title of the second *Untimely Meditation: On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. UM.ii.10: '[I] demand that the human should above all learn to live and should use history only in the service of the life [he has] learned [to live].' In *Human All too Human* he continues to mull the question whether truth is harmful to life; e.g. HH.i.34. Notice the important role of life at the beginning of *The Gay Science*, GS1.

<sup>3</sup> This is Zarathustra's role too: Z.ii.19, iii.13. Nietzsche also says that he belongs to the 'friends of life' [KSA.10.2[4] [1882], 10.4[1] [1882-3]].

<sup>4</sup> WP266 [1886-7] is a sketch of a book about morality's relation to life: 'opposition of life and morality: morality judged and condemned from life'. It lists ways morality has been detrimental to life—but also ways it has been useful. BGE2: 'For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve: it would be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for all life must be ascribed to appearance, the will to deception, selfishness, and lust.' See also BGE4, 19, 23.

Why is this idea of life so easy to discount, despite its omnipresence? Chiefly I think because it seems hopelessly vague, and as such quite unable to do the work Nietzsche wants it for. When he tells us that he 'takes the side of life', we remember how wide a spectrum of viewpoints can call themselves 'pro life'. Moreover, it seems that every viewpoint, just insofar as it values, can claim (if it wants) a right to so count itself. For inasmuch as values render a judgment how to live, any of them are (in this way) for the sake of life. Any values—including the Christian—purport to tell how to live life best; each is a strategy for life. Nietzsche remarks this all-inclusiveness when he says of the advice “‘live according to life’ — how could you not? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?’ [BGE9] These impressions of vagueness and indeterminacy are reinforced by the way his most conspicuous mentions of life are those poetic personifications of 'her'. If he is so loose and metaphorical here, we may suspect him to be just a little less so elsewhere too. And indeed even in places where he's not actually personifying life, he sometimes seems to be treating it as a 'thing' in ways that can only be metaphorical.

I will try to show that Nietzsche's idea of life is not so much indefinite as multiple, and that we can profitably examine and sort out this multiplicity. I want to think about the relations in which Nietzsche's different notions of life stand to one another, including which might have priority. And I want to say something about those personifications of life, and their relation to any arguments.

Now it might seem that the second main term, 'values', is much less problematic. But I think there's also an ambiguity here that we need to expose. And I think we especially need clarity here because we miss out on a large part of Nietzsche's point if we take the term 'values' for granted—if we hear it, say, in the way the term is used in contemporary ethics. Much of the interest of Nietzsche's thought lies in the ways it is hard to align with prevailing debates; I'll try to bring out this recalcitrance.

Nietzsche's idea of 'values' is complicated by, first, his strong naturalism regarding values. Values are naturally occurring entities; they occur in or by virtue of real acts of valuing; genealogy studies how they evolve. Here in this naturalism Nietzsche takes an external or third-personal view of values. However he also 'posits values' in a quite different way: by valuing, first-personally, himself. Our key question

will be the relation between these two ways of ‘positing values’: how—if at all—does his naturalistic study of them guide and support the values he himself proposes?

Nietzsche’s idea of values is further complicated by the way his naturalism leads to a certain critique of the very faculty of reflecting on, choosing, and abiding by values, which it is the point of ethics to develop and improve in us. He questions whether we have such a faculty, and whether (if we do) it’s in fact desirable. This critique is often interpreted as bearing especially against ‘free will’. But I think it’s much broader than this; it attacks our confidence in our agency, and in our ‘agential’ way of valuing. It calls into question the importance and value of what we usually call ‘valuing’, the kind of values we’re aware of and put into words. I’ll argue that this attack, though not meant to be fatal, points a lesson to change how agency and its values work in us—their role in our personal economy.

After talking first about life, then about values, I’ll turn finally to the question how the former are used to correct/guide the latter. Nietzsche faces three challenges here, and we must see how he meets them. First, he must give reasons or arguments for appealing to life—justifications of its authority to correct our values. Second he must extract from life some determinate criterion to serve as a standard to revalue values. And third he must show that this criterion can actually be used to generate new values we might plausibly practice.

There is a large philosophical difficulty in meeting these challenges. In extracting from life a ‘criterion’ for revaluing values, Nietzsche is extracting a value—a value offered as authoritative for revising other values. But any argument from life to such a value seems to (try to) derive a value from a fact, which is often taken as an outright mistake. How, from the premise that life is so and so, could any valuative conclusions follow as to how we should be? We must study Nietzsche’s prospects for using life to support his values in a way that can deflect this obvious retort.

Before looking at some passages, I want to offer a very quick partition of some senses in which Nietzsche (or anyone) might use ‘life’.<sup>5</sup> We will hold these options in mind when we look at the passages. Which of the following—or which combination of

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Schacht’s partition [1983, 234ff.] of the ‘biological-scientific’ and ‘experiential-psychological’ ways in which Nietzsche regards life.

them—does Nietzsche mean? When he counsels us, for example, to ‘say Yes to life’, which sense of life is intended? And similarly with his claim that ‘life is will to power’, what kind of life does he so characterize?

**1) Biological.** Life = all organisms, or what it is to be an organism. So either a) life is the sum total of organisms, as when one says ‘So far as we know, life is confined to this planet.’ Or b) life is the property (being-alive) that all of these organisms possess, as when one says ‘Life is what they all have in common.’ If meant biologically, ‘saying Yes to life’ would be affirming or valuing all organic life, or that property of aliveness that all of it has. And if meant biologically, ‘life is will to power’ would say that organisms’ aliveness either is or involves willing power. If it’s life in this sense that underlies his values, Nietzsche’s biology would play a crucial role indeed.

**2) Human.** Life = all humans, or what it is to be a human being. There can be the same distinction here between referring to the whole set of humans, or to their property of being-alive (or being-humanly-alive). In this case life is to be studied not by biology but by anthropology—yet in the same scientific fashion. If meant in this sense, ‘saying Yes to life’ would mean affirming or valuing human life, and the claim that ‘life is will to power’ would apply only to human life.

**3) Phenomenal.** Life = the experience of living, what it’s like to live (either as an organism, or as a human). When we say ‘Life is hard,’ I think we mean life in this sense. Meant so, ‘life’ always involves a point of view, an intentionality that has this experience. And—looking ahead—this is how Nietzsche thinks of not just human life, but biological life in general. To understand organisms we must see them not as mechanical systems but as wills or drives, with perspectives and aims. (So life is something ‘lived’, i.e. experienced, a sense captured in the German *erlebt*.) This is indeed part of what is meant by the claim that ‘life is will to power’. If meant the same way, ‘saying Yes to life’ would be affirming the (first-personal) effort or experience of living.

**4) Personal.** Life = that which a person is aware of living through. Each of us understands him/herself as living a life, my life between birth and death. Perhaps this is the special character of phenomenal life in the case of humans: the life recognizes about itself, that it is this interval, before death, of first-personal effort and feeling. If I say

‘Life teaches me . . . ,’ I probably mean life in this sense. And if Nietzsche advocates in this sense ‘saying Yes to life’, he means affirming or valuing my life, my experience of living a life. The claim ‘life is will to power’ would attribute this will to the standpoint that has this personal life in view.

**5) Poetic.** Life = [no definition is feasible; the term isn’t a concept denoting a certain descriptive content]. Let’s distinguish two ways life might be meant poetically.

a) ‘Life’ is a metaphorical stand-in for something else. The most obvious case is *Zarathustra's* personification of Life as a woman—although here we may suspect that Life represents life in one of the four prior senses. But it’s also possible that Nietzsche everywhere uses ‘life’ metaphorically, and not in those senses—even where he doesn’t explicitly personify it. Perhaps when he says Yes to life, it stands for that particular way of living he promotes to us. In this light, we might hear ‘life is will to power’ as Nietzsche’s announcement of what he’ll be using ‘life’ as a metaphor for: will to power.

b) ‘Life’ is used not to communicate any content at all, even indirectly by metaphor, but to attune our feelings a certain way. It’s used only emotively, not to designate or refer (even as metaphor). In this case the expression ‘life is will to power’ might mean just ‘you should will power’. Then Nietzsche would not really use life to justify his values, but to attach certain feelings to them. The term would function not as part of an argument, but in his rhetorical selling of his values.

These poetic uses of ‘life’ thus pose a threat to my project: if all his uses are really poetic, especially in that emotive way, then he wouldn’t mean them as arguments for his values after all. As we’ll see though, there are many places Nietzsche clearly uses ‘life’ to designate—in the biological, human, phenomenal, and personal senses—and to count as justifying his values. If he is tricking us here, and these arguments are also meant in that rhetorical spirit, there would be very little we could trust him on. I think we must assume that he does not cynically give arguments he knows are bad, just for their power to persuade.

On the other hand I do think that Nietzsche’s poetic uses of ‘life’ are extremely important to him. An adequate account must do justice to the strong affective force he gives it, in particular by embedding it in certain dramatic scenarios. These poetic uses express ideas about life that don’t show up in the argument that runs through the

biological and other senses. We must see how to connect the argumentative and affective uses of the term.

## 2. Passages and issues.

Let's start though with Nietzsche's most poetic and dramatic treatments of life, his personifications of her in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. What these mean, and also whether they mean some point about life we can formulate, will be ultimate issues for us. These passages open up another dimension of problems for us, and give us a fuller sense of Nietzsche's topic of life. Is there any argument in (or behind) this drama with 'Life'? In which of the above senses is life here represented?

The personification of Life in *Zarathustra* begins in ii.10, 'The Dance-Song', where Zarathustra's song begins: 'Into your eye I looked lately, O Life! And into the unfathomable [*Unergründliche*] I seemed then to be sinking. / But you pulled me out with a golden fishing-rod; mockingly you laughed when I called you unfathomable. / "So runs the talk of all fishes," you said; "what they do not fathom is unfathomable. / "But changeable am I only and wild and in all things a woman, and not a virtuous one . . . ."

Note here the image of depth, of life as an encompassing medium one sinks down into, towards no bottom, no place to find ground. This lack of ground is epistemic: we can't find the explanation or truth about life, we can't see to the bottom of it. We can't see to the bottom, above all, of what it's for, of its purpose or meaning. (To life in which sense do these thoughts apply?) Notice also that Life implies that she has a ground, even if people can't find it.<sup>6</sup>

'The Dance-Song' then introduces a second female, his 'wild Wisdom', and depicts the two of them jealous over him. Zarathustra sums the situation: 'Thus it stands, then, among us three. From the ground up I love only Life — and verily, most of all when I hate her! / But that I am good to Wisdom and often too good: that is because she reminds me so much of Life!'

Zarathustra's love for life belongs to a great host of passages in which Nietzsche promotes 'saying Yes to life'; we'll examine these later. Notice here how the idea of

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the image of Life drawing him out of herself (*mit goldner Angel*): does this mean he leaves the medium or perspective of life? Nietzsche elsewhere denies this is possible, we'll see.

ground [*Grund*] returns, in Zarathustra's striking statement that he loves only life 'from the ground up'. Now is this life's ground, or Zarathustra's? If he loves life from its own ground up, this would seem to mean loving it as it is, and hence knowing what it is—and knowing in particular what it's for, its ground as its purpose or meaning. So does Zarathustra think he has fathomed it after all? Or is it rather that he loves life 'from the bottom of himself', i.e. wholeheartedly?

We should also remark the competition between his love for/by life, with that for/by wisdom. As his two loves they represent Zarathustra's (and Nietzsche's) ultimate ends. The second, 'wisdom', is ambiguous: does it refer to Zarathustra's effort at truth, i.e. his will to truth, or to his achievement of it (the truth he knows)? In any case this attachment to truth stands in tension with his love of life, even though he cares about truth because it reminds him of life. We'll examine this conflict between life and truth.

Life as persona reappears soon in ii.12 'On Self-Overcoming', to which I'll return. But let's jump first to iii.15, 'The Other Dance-Song', where Zarathustra's romance with life is resumed, again in a song sung by Zarathustra's soul to Life: "'Into your eye I looked lately, O Life: gold I saw in your night-eye glinting, — my heart stood still from this delight: / "— a golden boat I saw glinting on nocturnal waters: a sinking, drinking, ever-winking golden rocking-boat!"' Note that life is again depicted as a sea. Now there's a boat, but a 'sinking' boat that doesn't keep one out of life's depths. This is presumably the boat of Dionysus, bringing the new ideal.

After the song there is a conversation between Zarathustra and Life, in which she tells him: "'And even if we do not love each other from the ground up —, must one then be cross, because one does not love from the ground up? / "And that I am good to you and often too good, that you know: and the reason [*Grund*] is that I am jealous of your Wisdom. Ah, that crazy old madwoman Wisdom! / "If your Wisdom should ever desert you, ah! then my love too would desert you just as swiftly." — '

The idea of 'loving from the ground up' returns, with the same ambiguity (whose ground?) we noted. Life doubts that they so love one another, but seems to reject that requirement. Is it full insight, or full devotion, that's not required? And she says that she is 'good' to him from jealousy of his wisdom, which is indeed all that sustains her love of

him. Once again: in which of the above senses of 'life' might it make sense to think that love for it is in this kind of conflict with love of truth?

There then follows the climax of the book, rich with significance: 'Thereupon Life looked pensively behind her and about her and said softly: "O Zarathustra, you are not true enough to me! / "You have long not loved me as much as you say you do; I know you are thinking that you will to leave me soon. . . . / "Yes," I answered hesitantly, "but you also know that —" And I said something into her ear, right through her tangled yellow crazy locks of hair. / "You know that, O Zarathustra? No one knows that. — —"

Presumably Zarathustra has said that he knows he will eternally return. He then marries Life with the 'ring' of eternal return, and she changes her name to Eternity in the final chapter of Part iii.<sup>7</sup>

What's the meaning of these dramatic events at the climax of the book Nietzsche valued most? Is there any philosophical claim or argument in this drama with Life? Or can we at least find hints or indications of what Nietzsche means to claim and argue elsewhere? And there is still the challenge to say what 'Life' stands for here: biological life, or human life, or phenomenal aliveness, or Zarathustra's own life? Or does the personification function 'just' poetically or rhetorically, to affect us?

This device of personifying some abstraction as a woman is used elsewhere by Nietzsche. *Zarathustra's* 'Wisdom' is echoed in the famous opening of the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'Supposing truth is a woman'. And *Zarathustra's* 'Life' is anticipated in GS339, entitled '*Vita femina*', which concludes: 'But perhaps that is the strongest magic of life: a gold-worked veil of beautiful possibilities lies over it, promising, resisting, bashful, mocking, compassionate, seductive. Yes, life is a woman!'

Obviously enough, these 'femalizations' are adopted where the abstract entity is something that Nietzsche loves or strains towards. Woman is Nietzsche's personification of end-hood, of what one wants, loves, wills. This personification gives to this willing a specifically erotic character. Is there any larger significance to this? What is it, to stand in an erotic relation to life—and again, to life in what sense?

Now I've skipped over one important section in *Zarathustra* using this personification of life: ii.12 ('On Self-Overcoming'). It has a somewhat different

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<sup>7</sup> See the illuminating account of the drama of Z in Lampert 1986.

character than the others. For here Nietzsche explicitly relates the character Life to a discussion of the (kind of) life that is being personified. He partly does this by having Life describe herself. Hence he offers much more content about life than in the other personifications. The content he announces, of course, is that life is will to power.

Notice that Zarathustra first seems to derive the point from third-personal observation: 'Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of one who serves I found a will to be master.' But he then presents this as something told him by Life: 'And this secret did Life herself tell to me. "Behold," she said, "I am that which must always overcome itself. / "Indeed, you call it will to procreate or drive towards an end, towards the higher, farther, more manifold: but all this is one and one secret.'"

A bit later Life gives Nietzsche's famous expression: "'He surely missed the truth who shot at it the words 'will to existence [*Dasein*]: this will — does not exist! / "For: what is not cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still will to exist! / "Only, where Life is, there too is will: though not will to life, but — thus I teach you — will to power! / "Much is valued by the living more highly than life itself; but out of this very valuing there speaks — will to power!" — / Thus did Life once teach me: and with this, you who are wisest, I go on to solve the riddle of your hearts.' He solves the riddle of their hearts, because he sees their deepest aim, at power.

### 3. Life's ends.

Let's now begin to address these two sets of puzzles about Nietzsche's use of 'life': over its abstract role in his justification of his values, and its exotic presentation in a sexual scenario. Since it is the account of life as will to power that gives his most obvious ground for his values, let's begin there.<sup>8</sup> This claim that life is will to power appears to be a biological point, an account of the life of all organisms. Nietzsche purports to uncover life as such scientifically—not of course so much by his own observations of other organisms, as by reflection on the biological literature he read so attentively.

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<sup>8</sup> I give much fuller accounts of will to power in my [1996 §1.1] and [2004 ch. 1 §5]; the latter, neo-Darwinian account is more consonant with the one I sketch here.

WP641 [1883-4] gives this definition: 'A multiplicity of forces, connected by a common nutrition-procedure, we call "life". To this nutrition-procedure, as a means of making it possible, belong all so-called feelings, representations, thoughts, i.e. (1) a striving-against all other forces, (2) a preparation for this by form and rhythm, (3) an evaluation in regard to incorporation or separation.' This presents forces as accruing around a 'nutrition-procedure', i.e. a certain metabolic mechanism. This might suggest that nutrition, and the aim to eat, is our deepest project, and that the intentional 'striving' against others is a secondary means.

But elsewhere Nietzsche insists that nutrition and eating are themselves expressions of life's basic directedness, its will to power. The organism aims to 'incorporate' other organisms not for the sake of sustaining itself (nor reproducing itself) but in order to grow by overcoming.<sup>9</sup> WP681 [1886-7]: 'life is not adaptation of inner conditions to outer, but will to power, which, [working] from within, subdues and incorporates ever more "outer"'. And WP656 [1887]: 'Appropriation and incorporation is above all a willing to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping until finally the overwhelmed has gone completely over into the power of the attacker and has increased it'.<sup>10</sup>

So although Nietzsche is critical of 'teleology', his main claim about life attributes this particular aim or purpose to it. It's by virtue of this aiming that organisms have perspectives, and interpret. WP643 [1885-6]: 'The will to power interprets: the formation of an organ is a matter of interpretation; it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. Mere variations of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wills to grow, that interprets the value of whatever else wants to grow. . . . (The organic process constantly presupposes interpretations.)' Note that the thesis of will to power is not a metaphysical or (universal) ontological

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<sup>9</sup> WP702 [1888]: 'Let us take the simplest case, that of primitive nourishing: the protoplasm stretches its pseudopods out, in search of something that opposes it — not out of hunger, but will to power.' Also WP657 [1886-7], WP651 [1887-8], WP652 [1888]. Nietzsche argues similarly that procreation is a derivative project in WP654 [1885-6]. WP658 [1885] makes the general point: 'the organic functions translated back into the basic will, the will to power, — and splitting off from it.'

<sup>10</sup> Compare the definition of life in WP642 [1885].

claim, but a biological one: its principal application is to life, and Nietzsche sees the extension to inorganic nature as speculative and dispensable.<sup>11</sup>

These passages have all come from Nietzsche's notebooks, but the main points are made in the published works too. Here are three prominent passages. BGE13: 'Physiologists should think twice before putting down the self-preservation-drive as the cardinal drive of an organic being. A living thing [*etwas Lebendiges*] wills above all to discharge its strength — life itself is will to power —: self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results.'<sup>12</sup> GS349: 'The struggle for existence [*Dasein*] is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the life-will [*Lebenswillens*]; the great and small struggle revolves everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power, in accordance with the will to power which is simply [*eben*] the will of life [*Wille des Lebens*, mistranslated in the Cambridge edition as "will to life"]!' And GM.ii.12 says that in making 'adaptation' basic, Darwinists like Spencer 'mistake the essence [*Wesen*] of life, its will to power; thereby the fundamental priority of the spontaneous, attacking, infringing, reinterpreting, reordering, and formative forces is overlooked'.

As these show, Nietzsche often puts this point in opposition to an alternative he thinks is widespread, shared diversely by Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Darwinists: that life strives to survive, to exist.<sup>13</sup> So WP688 [1888]: 'It can be shown most clearly for every living thing, that it does everything, not in order to preserve itself, but to become more'. And GS349 again: 'To will to preserve oneself is the expression of distress, of a limitation of the genuinely basic drive of life [*Lebens-Grundtriebes*] which aims at the expansion of power and in this willing frequently puts in question and even sacrifices self-preservation.'

What is this 'power' that life is distinctively towards? I suggest that we understand it as a 'growth by control'. The rough picture is of organisms—and even their organic parts—as competing to subordinate and control one another, to grow by taking power over one another. In particular, organisms are bodies distinguished by their

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. BGE36, WP689 [1888].

<sup>12</sup> This is echoed later in BGE, in 259: 'life simply is will to power [*Leben eben Wille zur Macht ist*].'

<sup>13</sup> Earlier Nietzsche often speaks of end as preservation, however; see e.g. GS1.

particular sets of drives, which are behavioral dispositions directed at particular acts or outcomes. And Nietzsche's claim about will to power is that these manifold drives all aim, not just at their distinguishing ends (sex for the sex drive, eating for the hunger drive), but at the more ultimate end of such growth and control. Eating is perhaps the most obvious (and brutal) way of growing by overcoming: the organism 'incorporates' another's tissue. But there are many other ways of incorporating other living things by subordinating their activity to one's own (including our efforts with Nietzsche now).

And yet, when Nietzsche attributes will to power to 'life', it may seem he couldn't, or at least shouldn't, mean life biologically. For how can it be plausible to attribute this end-directedness, with its associated intentionality, to all living things? Doesn't this involve attributing mental or cognitive powers to them? And how can we seriously suppose that the amoeba, or 'protoplasm' (which Nietzsche often speaks of this way<sup>14</sup>), has 'drives' thus aimed at power?

In *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* I try to show how Nietzsche can (and sometimes does) fully naturalize this biological notion of will to power, by presenting it as a directedness designed into organisms by natural selection. So life values in (by virtue of) its selected plasticity towards outcomes. The amoeba's hunger-drive is its dispositional responsiveness to the conditions around it, by which it identifies and assimilates food. It thereby uses these environmental resources for its own growth, i.e. the enhancement of its powers. This outcome 'power' is the end of this disposition not because there is any 'preview' of that outcome within the amoeba, but because that's what the disposition was selected to do (that's what gave it selective advantage).<sup>15</sup> So the outcome (power) explains why the disposition is there in the amoeba, and this explanatory structure is what it is, for an outcome to be an end.

By naturalizing end-directedness in this way, Nietzsche can (perhaps) naturalize a biological intentionality or perspectivity as well. Science—at least science so far—has tried to reduce nature to 'a happening arranged for sight and touch, consequently as motions' [WP640 [1883-4]].<sup>16</sup> So it treats them simply as mechanisms. Nietzsche insists

<sup>14</sup> E.g. WP656 [1887], WP651 [1887-8], WP702 [1888].

<sup>15</sup> Here I lean on the 'etioloical' analysis of functions pioneered by Wright, e.g. in [1973]; I develop this in [2004, ch. 1 §3].

<sup>16</sup> Also WP634 [1888], WP625 [1888].

we must go beyond science-so-far by introducing 'will', i.e. directed effort. In being responsively directed towards certain ends, organisms have 'perspectives' or 'views'—as even the amoeba does in its differential responsiveness to environmental cues. He can argue this without sacrificing his naturalism, by taking this directedness to be constituted by selection. Hence, as hinted already, all biological life is also phenomenal.

Still, even if Nietzsche does think of all biological life as willing power in this way, it may seem that this view can't be that important to him, given that his attention is overwhelmingly focused on one particular kind of organism, the human. Isn't all that matters, that he thinks of humans as willing power in this way? So aren't his biological claims about life quite aside from the main point?

But I think it's important to Nietzsche that 'life' also refers to something wider than the human—yet something that is represented and accessible within us. For he thinks that the wills or drives of other kinds of life are built into us, by the way evolution works: our genetic line passed through the simpler modes of life, which has built their dispositions and aims into each of us. So Nietzsche shares, for his own reasons, Aristotle's view of life as forming a hierarchy, and of the human as containing 'lower' forms of life within it. Here 'lower' simply means: capable of less diverse and effective control, i.e. with fewer and simpler power-drives.

This means that 'life's ends', the ends of biological life, are to an important extent built into me individually. Life is not just the largest genus to which I belong, but my inner constitution.<sup>17</sup> More precisely, a range of other members of this genus are represented in me: I bear parts of their aims and perspectives. So I also bear samples from the stances of earlier stages of human life. This persistence of evolutionarily earlier traits is a very important idea for Nietzsche; he harps on it especially in *Human All-too-Human*.

Nietzsche thinks of each human life as opening out into biological life generally. It is a medium we enter at our own point, but in which we communicate with all the rest. Here are a few characteristic passages (there are many others like these): WP678 [1886-7]: 'The human is not only an individual [*Individuum*], but the on-living collective-organic [*Fortlebende Gesamt-Organische*] in one particular line.' And WP682 [1887]:

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<sup>17</sup> BGE258: 'the foundation of the affects, which is called "life"'.

‘The *ego* is a hundred times more than just a unit in the chain of members; it is this chain itself, entirely’.<sup>18</sup>

This reveals in turn another way Nietzsche thinks he has access to (biological) life's essence: by experiencing or feeling it within himself. The reason is not metaphysical (as in Schopenhauer) but naturalistic and biological: these other levels of life are built into us, are elements within us. (Recall *Zarathustra's* depiction of life as a sea—its depths reach down within us.) The inevitable image is of them as lower strata in our dispositional set. What's built into us are layers of 'directed efforts', tendencies plastic towards outcomes or ends. Inasmuch as these dispositions are responsive and intentional, we can experience them, even deep and primordial ones, ourselves.

As Nietzsche often thinks of it, these lower strata of life's willing are built into us in our bodies. Here he uses 'body' in a way that distinguishes it from our spirit, from our conscious-linguistic intentionality (our agency). Elsewhere to be sure he emphasises that we are just our bodies, and that spirit is just a fact about the body. So Z.i.4: 'Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something of the body.' Still he continues to use 'body' to refer to this subset of the body's capacities, those made not by social history but by a more ancient, pre-human genetic evolution.

Because these deep projects are intentional, they are part of an individual human's stance, and are accessible in a first-personal attitude. It's possible to make explicit, to bring to awareness, the end-directedness in our body. We can notice better than we usually do 'what it's like' to will as these bodily drives do. And I think this is another kind of access Nietzsche thinks he has to the truth that biological (and human) life is will to power. It's not just by those studies of biological works, but also by a kind of phenomenology—of course Nietzsche doesn't have this term—that he thinks he can see this truth. By 'living' his body more alertly, he can see the biological will at work in it.

So what's most important to Nietzsche is the human way of encountering this level of biological life within us—understanding both of these as something phenomenal. But what about the fourth sense for 'life', what I called the personal? Does Nietzsche give any importance to our awareness of 'living a life', of being in a single passage between birth and death? Not surprisingly there are many discussions of life in this sense

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<sup>18</sup> Also WP687 [1887], WP785 [1887], WP379 [1887], WP373 [1888].

in *Ecce Homo*. But they also occur many places outside that explicit autobiography. GS324: '*In media vita*. No! Life has not disappointed me! From year to year I find it much truer, more desirable and more mysterious, — since the day the great liberator overcame me, the thought that life could be an experiment for the knowledge-seeker.' Here I believe 'life' refers to his individual life as he has it to live—he shows here his reflection on just how to live it.

It is a part of this individual life that he lives it in this body, that bears as it does many strata of drives—dispositions and projects—laid down in the social and evolutionary past. 'Life' in a biological sense is represented in the deepest layers of this bodily end-directedness; this is something generic, built as well into all the other descendents since its first fixing by selection. We live this personal life, before death, in a body whose biological wills must be given their due, as we so live it. We'll later see how this relation to a personal life is the real center of Nietzsche's own values.

#### **4. Values: in our bodies and as agents.**

Having sorted some of the multiplicity in Nietzsche's idea of 'life', let's now turn our attention to the 'values' he's going to use this idea of life to correct. What are values, according to Nietzsche? *Werth* is another of his favorite, indispensable terms.

I've said that it's crucial to distinguish between two ways in which Nietzsche speaks about values—two ways he 'posits' values. (Later I'll add that he also posits two kinds of values, cutting across this first distinction.) a) On the one hand he studies, in his special naturalistic way, different kinds of values, as the intentional objects of particular acts of valuing—in particular by groups of persons. b) But on the other hand he values certain things, himself: i.e. he makes value judgments, he expresses that these things are valuable to him.

In this section let's focus on his naturalistic study of values. Here he makes, of course, no commitment to valuing these things himself; indeed he most often studies values he clearly does not share in. In §5 we'll look at the way he tries to move from this study of values (and life) to his own values, which he commends to us.

Now familiarly enough, Nietzsche is in one sense an anti-realist about values; they arise only through intentional acts of valuing. Z.i.15: 'First through esteeming

[*Schätzen*] is there value.' But he's certainly a realist about these acts of valuing: there's a fact to the matter, what values what.

Moreover it's crucial to notice that he thinks that these real acts of valuing extend far more widely than we suppose. He attributes valuing to all biological life:

KSA.11.25[433]: "'Alive": that means already esteeming: — / In all willing is esteeming — and will is there in the organic.' KSA.11.26[72]: 'Valuations [*Werthschätzungen*] lie in all functions of the organic being.'

We've already seen how all organisms have had directedness (teleology) designed into them, in their plastic (responsive) drives. And now it's easy to add, that Nietzsche thinks of this directedness, this willing, as already a valuing: its ends are values, as are the means it is responsive to. WP260 [1883-4]: 'But willing: = willing an end. End contains a valuation.' Once again this is not a matter of attributing minds, or cognitive-representational powers, to organisms and their parts. Organisms value power not by having a concept of power, but by having been selected to be responsive towards outcomes that enhance their power or control. So even the amoeba values power by its responsive disposition, designed into it by selection, to appropriate other organisms into itself as food; this disposition 'wills power' inasmuch as it was selected because it brings about this 'growth by control'.

Thus Nietzsche thinks that all biological life—every organism—values. But he also thinks that this biological life is built into each of us, in our underlying bodily drives. So these are a way in which each of us values, as well. And although Nietzsche cares not at all about how an amoeba or a cat or a chimp values, he thinks that an 'animal' kind of valuing operates in us all the time, in the 'part' of us we call our body. I'll refer to this lower level of valuing in us as body-values; these are the ends in us, that we share with other living things. Nietzsche speaks of this valuing whenever he speaks of our drives.

But of course this isn't what we usually call our 'values', which are the values we're aware of and put into words, the principles we refer to in order to steer our actions. They are our ethics or morality. By contrast with body-values, I'll call these agent-values. These are conscious and linguistic, the rules or ideals we formulate and then refer to in 'moments of decision'. Making a decision is, in many cases at least, precisely a

matter of acting on the basis of such reference. What does Nietzsche say about values in this ordinary sense?

We greatly pride ourselves on this agency; we claim to be 'sovereign individuals' in it. It's a main mark of distinction for the human. Such valuing seems to involve a very different kind of teleology than we've seen holds for biological values. The amoeba 'aims' at power insofar as this is the outcome its responsive dispositions were selected to effect. The outcome explains insofar as ancestral achievements of it gave selective advantage explaining the disposition now. But when we 'value' a certain outcome in our ordinary sense this is because we represent it to ourselves in advance, desire it and act accordingly; this is what we call 'agency'. So here the outcome explains as 'represented in advance', which can seem to be the only real kind of teleology.

But Nietzsche raises strong doubts against this agency. He thinks we should be far more suspicious of it than we are. He questions, that is, not just the particular rules and ideals—the content—we value in this way. He also questions this very way of valuing, this very way of deciding our behavior. His critiques of 'what' and 'how' we value are of course linked; they express a common diagnosis of our agent-values.

Nietzsche makes two kinds of attacks on agency (and agent-values).<sup>19</sup> They may seem inconsistent. a) On the one hand he belittles agency as epiphenomenal, as not really effective. Things are quite thoroughly settled elsewhere in us—in our bodily drives in particular—and our 'decisions' based on conscious values merely express those real forces. b) But on the other hand he decries our agency as harmful, as all-too-effective against our real interests.

a) Take first the claim that agency is epiphenomenal. Sometimes the point is that the entire causal process works elsewhere, in the body, and our conscious choices are after-effects that change nothing themselves. But more commonly the point is that those choices, and the agent-values they're steered by, are tools of bodily drives. So they're effective indeed, but only as instruments for the real 'deciders' beneath them, the body-values. So Z.i.4: 'Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown wise man — his name is Self. In your body he dwells, he is

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<sup>19</sup> I give a fuller account of Nietzsche's genealogy for agency in my [2009].

your body. / . . . The creating body created spirit for itself as a hand of its will.<sup>20</sup> And WP254 [1885-6]: ‘what is the meaning of evaluating [*Werthschätzen*] itself? . . . Answer: moral evaluating is an exegesis, a way of interpreting. The exegesis itself is a symptom of certain physiological conditions, likewise of a particular spiritual level of ruling judgments: Who interprets? — our affects.’ WP314 [1887-8]: ‘Our most sacred convictions, the unchangeable in regard to supreme values, are judgments of our muscles’.

This is the first way agency is a sham. It is not as distinct and independent from that biological way of valuing as it claims. The representation may indeed explain the behavior in some of these cases—it does indeed do some work—yet this explanation is incomplete unless we see what explains the representation. And when we do, we see how agent-values rest on the other kind of teleology after all, and so have their fuller significance in that same body-value way. When Nietzsche thinks of our agent-values this way he finds them for the most part benign: as instruments for body-valuing, they serve the latter’s largely-healthy ends.

b) But Nietzsche also has a second story. This makes agency not only effective but also harmful, by the way it works against the interests in our body. In this light Nietzsche sees agency as favoring interests foreign to the body. In particular, agency is a ‘secret agent’ on behalf of society, understood to require a very strong homogeneity and likeness among its members. And we will only be sufficiently homogeneous if we very strongly want to be like one another, want to ‘do as one does’. Agency, and its agent-values, were designed—in the same extended sense in which natural selection designs—by pre-historical cultural processes to ‘tame’ and ‘domesticate’ the human animal. Nietzsche tells this story in the famous second Essay of the *Genealogy*.

Agency is the ‘ability to promise’, above all the ability to promise to obey the social rules. This involves the capacity to remember the rules in the heat of the moment when drives are engaged—when the urge to take the marketplace fruit is strongest. One becomes conscious of a linguistic formula such as ‘don’t steal’, and this awareness has a

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<sup>20</sup> Z.i.3 says that even belief in an ‘other world’ is rooted in the body—in a body’s despair of itself.

crucially inhibitive effect: one refrains from acting as the drive pushes.<sup>21</sup> This ability to promise—to act not by one’s immediate drives but by conscious reference to principles—is deeply designed to subordinate us to social rules—to turn us into ‘herd animals’. So the key feature of agent-values—uppermost in Nietzsche’s mind—is that they’re designed not in my interest (not for my personal life) but for social purposes, by a kind of ‘group selection’. So values are the ‘tablet of things held good’ that ‘hangs over every people’ (Z.i.15). WP275 [1886-7] answers the question ‘who speaks in our values?’ (which used to be answered ‘God’): ‘My answer, taken not from metaphysics but from animal physiology: the herd-instinct speaks. It wills to be master: hence its “thou shalt!”[:] it will allow the individual to matter only in the sense of the whole, for the good of the whole’.<sup>22</sup>

So agent-values are not individual but social; to be a value is to hang over a society this way. And the agent’s impression of sovereignty, of choosing in his/her valuing, is false—is indeed designed into agency as a refinement of social control. I have my values not by choice, but by their seduction of me—a seduction the social process has designed them for. I think I’m free in my valuing, but this is the better to steer me to a socializing end. I think I’m doing what I decide, but it was decided long ago, in the social process, that so doing serves that end.

How can we reconcile a) and b)? How can agent-values express both bodily drives, but also these interests foreign to the body? As I’ve noted Nietzsche uses ‘body’ elastically, and here too. For there is a way in which those foreign interests—the social purpose to herd and homogenize me—are built into my body.<sup>23</sup> They are there in the form of a ‘herd instinct’, the deposit in my body of that long pre-historical domesticating of my ancestors. Still, in another light Nietzsche regards this instinct as not quite so ‘bodily’ as the drives and dispositions settled by genetic selection in our deeper past.

## 5. Life's end as corrective criterion.

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<sup>21</sup> This is why our agent-values are deeply ascetic; GM.iii claims that all (human) values so far have promoted ‘the ascetic ideal’.

<sup>22</sup> WP276 [1886-7]: ‘The whole of E[uropean] morality is based upon what is useful for the herd’.

<sup>23</sup> Z.i.22: ‘In a hundred ways up to now has spirit as well as virtue flown away and made mistakes. Ah, in our bodies all this delusion and mistaking still dwell: body and will it has become there.’

Having surveyed some of the complexities in Nietzsche's notions of life and of value, let's come back now to his argument from life to values. This might be considered his strategy for getting from a fact to a value: for persuading us that because life is so and so, such and such is good. We'll see that this argument from life to a criterial value takes two forms. Sometimes the point seems to be that life itself is the ultimate good.<sup>24</sup> But elsewhere, and principally I think, the point is that life essentially values a certain good, and by doing so makes that good ultimate. We can separate three main questions.

1. First, what authority does life have? Nietzsche should give us a reason to accept its standing, to determine a criterion for values.
2. Next, what criterion does life supply? What basic value does it provide, to be used as a standard in the revaluation of values?
3. Third, what correction does this criterion make? What are the consequences of applying it? This is a question of results, of how this revaluation will change our values.

A. I'll begin by addressing these questions with respect to the biological idea of life, and examining how this idea supports a redesign of our agent-values. This is the way I addressed these questions in *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, and I think it is the most obvious way to think of Nietzsche's argument from life to values. But I'll eventually (in B.) suggest that it is crucially incomplete, and that to get the full scope of his point we need to bring in the personal idea of life, and see how it requires us to redesign more than just our agent-values. To afford space for these further ideas—which will let us address those 'poetic' treatments of life in *Zarathustra*—I will have to present this very rich first argument very compactly.

1. Consider first the authority of life—its authority to give (assign) a lesson or standard to us. What's the proof that life itself is good, much less the ultimate good? Or, why should what life values be thereby the ultimate good? Life needs authority, and it needs this authority, we should bear in mind, for each of us (his readers) individually. Nietzsche would want us each to ask: why should I care about life, or what it aims at? If there's an end built into biological life, why should it matter to me? This authority in life

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<sup>24</sup> Hunt [1991, 212] so reads him.

must give me a reason to revalue my values, and in particular my agent-values—those I put into words, and cite to myself in my deliberations and decisions.

Now Nietzsche has a long-standing interest in the question of the ‘value of life’ [*Werth des Lebens*].<sup>25</sup> He initially poses his disagreement with Schopenhauer in this way: he replaces the latter’s negative judgment on life with a positive one. In this early period he thinks it is the philosopher’s main task to make a judgment on this question.<sup>26</sup> He discusses the conditions required for such a judgment to be just or correct.<sup>27</sup> Even as late as BGE205 he suggests (without criticism) that the philosopher ‘demands of himself a judgment, a Yes or No, not about the sciences but about life and the value of life’.

However Nietzsche also has doubts from early on whether the project is feasible.<sup>28</sup> And he eventually comes to think there is something incoherent in the effort to state the value of life. TI.ii.2: ‘Judgments, value-judgments on life, for or against, can ultimately never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they can be taken seriously only as symptoms, — in themselves, judgments like these are stupidities. One must stretch out one’s fingers and make an effort to grasp this amazing subtlety [*finesse*], that the value of life cannot be evaluated [*abgeschätzt*].’ Judgments about the value of life will be crucially used as symptoms of whether a person ‘says Yes to life’.

But the reason these judgments can’t be true—Nietzsche here thinks<sup>29</sup>—is that life is the source or precondition for all values, so that it stands before and beyond them. He means biological life, understood as something phenomenal; it is the ‘source’ of all values in an intentional way: it means them. Values arise only by and in (biological)

<sup>25</sup> Notice his very lengthy notes on Dühring’s *The Value of Life* preserved as KSA 8.9[1] [1875].

<sup>26</sup> KSA 8.3[63] [1875] says that the philosopher uses the philologist’s labors ‘to make a statement about the value of life’. KSA 8.20[12] [1876-7]: ‘It is perhaps the most important goal of humanity, that the value of life be measured, and the reason [*Grund*] why it is there be correctly determined. It awaits for this the appearance of the highest intellect; for only this can settle the value or disvalue of life conclusively.’ (Cf. KSA 8.5[188] [1875], which adds the requirement of ‘the warmest heart’.)

<sup>27</sup> UM.iii.3: ‘The verdict of the philosophers of ancient Greece on the value of existence [*Daseins*] says so much more than a modern verdict does because they had life itself before and around them in luxuriant perfection’; see how the section ends.

<sup>28</sup> HH.i.32: ‘All judgments as to the value of life have evolved illogically and are therefore unjust.’ KSA 10.6[1] [1882-3]: ‘all estimates [*Ansätze*] about the value of life [are] false’.

<sup>29</sup> The passage continues: ‘Not by the living, who are an interested party, even a bone of contention [*Streitobjekt*], and not judges; not by the dead for other reasons.’ We can’t step out of life’s perspective, and still evaluate. The point is put most directly later in TI, at v.5. See how Schacht [1983, 395-8] and Reginster [2006, 82-3] develop the point.

life's end-directedness, and the valuing this involves. They are the intentional objects of the valuing life engages in. WP715 [1887-8]: 'The viewpoint of "value" is the viewpoint of preservation-enhancement conditions with respect to complex forms of relative duration of life within becoming'.

So the argument that it makes no sense to speak of the 'value of life', still gives life a certain authority. Life is not the ultimate value (good), but it is the ultimate valuer. And Nietzsche tries to use this authority to pick out what it values as the ultimate good; this will be, of course, power. He has several reasons for denying that life is itself the good. One is the transcendental point behind TI.ii.2 and v.5. Another is his idea that to make 'life' the good is to value merely 'staying-alive', or survival; it's to suppose that the end is 'more life', in the sense of longer life, and perhaps of more numerous life (we know how little these matter to Nietzsche). Making 'life' the good flattens the differences between levels or degrees of life, and promotes those efforts at more of a merely generic life. Life is not a consequentialist good we're to maximize.

On the other hand life, as what values, is the source of all values. And its valuing takes a form that gives life a presence in the ultimate value after all. For although life does not essentially value life,<sup>30</sup> it does so value power, and power is life's own growth. This reflexive character of life's valuing brings itself into its valuing: life wants more of itself. But the character of this 'more' is (as it were) qualitative: it's not longer life, or more numerous life, but this life brought to a higher level of capacity and control. So it is life's own essential valuing that sets the dimension in which life becomes more or better, and specifies the sense in which life—its qualitative increase—is indeed 'the good'.

2. Let's look more closely at Nietzsche's way of extracting a criterial value from life. The rough lines of the argument seem pretty evident. Life—biological life—has as its 'essence' will to power, i.e. a kind of directedness at power. So power is life's essential end, and this licenses it as the criterion for revaluing values.

Obviously the argument turns crucially on the notion of essence. That is, it turns not so much on this term—though Nietzsche does repeatedly use it [*Wesen*]<sup>31</sup>—but on the idea that willing power is somehow central or crucial to life in a way that requires an

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<sup>30</sup> This is the difference Nietzsche thinks he has with Darwin: life doesn't live in order to stay alive, i.e. to survive or preserve itself. The will of life is not a will to life, but to power.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. BGE259, GM.ii.12.

allegiance or respect for it. Nietzsche would want ‘essence’ to carry as little metaphysical weight as possible, but he does need some way to privilege will to power, among the other properties living things have, so that it can have the authority over values he wants for it.

Without so singling out some particular aspect of life as ‘essential’, it seems that life couldn’t supply a criterion, since in that case it would apply to everything we do or will. This is the problem of all-inclusiveness we noticed near the start; we saw there how Nietzsche remarks this problem in BGE9: “live according to life” — how could you not do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?’ If all values come from life, why don’t they all have the same status—each thing we will just as worthy as anything else? Specifying some values as essential privileges them, and lets them serve as correctives to other values—those we hold as agents, in particular.

So what’s essential is a directedness, at an end. This end can be achieved or realized to a greater or lesser degree. So there is a scale, running from lower/worse to higher/better, along which all living things can be ranked—are ranked by their own essential aiming.<sup>32</sup> Individual organisms move up or down on it, as ascending or declining life. Importantly, Nietzsche tends to conflate these degrees of achievement of the aim, with degrees of the directedness: an organism ranking high in power, is also a more complete or adequate will to power. Because will to power likewise occurs in degrees, life’s essence is differentially realized. Higher life, in more adequately willing power, is also ‘more alive’.<sup>33</sup> But what is it about will to power that can make it, in this special way, life’s essence?

The obvious suggestion is generality: will to power is the most widespread characteristic of living things, what they all have in common. So all living things will—and value—power, even though they may value other, non-universal, ends besides. But now why should this generality of will to power make it matter to me? Obviously, as a living thing myself it follows that I value this common end, as well as all my particular

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<sup>32</sup> WP592 [1886-7] says that the struggle between ‘sickly, despairing life’ and ‘richer, less degenerate life’ is ‘one kind of life in struggle with another. . . . Here the argument must settle that a rank-order is necessary, — that the first problem is that of the rank-order of kinds of life.’ Notice EH.i.1’s expression ‘ladder of life’.

<sup>33</sup> See EH.i.2 on *Mehr-leben*.

ends. But what reason do I have to prioritize the common over the particular? Why should the common or shared valuing give me reason to revalue the agent-values I now steer by?

Rather than its generality, I think it's will to power's depth that makes it essential for Nietzsche. Will to power lies 'beneath' all our other willing and aiming. This depth has chiefly a teleological character: will to power sets the first end, which functions as the 'final' end for all our other values. Other aimings all arise for the sake of, or as a means to, this power. And the organism persists in them due to an implicit judgment that they serve its own strengthening. So it is the effort at power that gives the ultimate point to our other values, including our explicit agent-values. This primary willing is our most persistent effort, even ineliminable and inescapable. So will to power is 'essential' not because of external relations of similarity I bear by it to other living things, but because it is embedded in a special way in me, so as to be inescapably and basically motivating. This makes essence biological more than metaphysical, we might say.

Now notice that in leaning on the idea that life's deep aim is inescapable for us, Nietzsche faces a dilemma. His use of life's essence as corrective criterion depends on two ideas that seem in tension: i) we can't help but will (value) power (because it's essential to life, hence our deepest viewpoint), ii) yet we do will things incompatible with power, which is why that criterion is needed as corrective. The advice to aim at power only occurs, we've seen, because it happens that we often do not aim at power. So this essence (willing power) is not completely compelling: we can 'fall away from it'. What kind of essence is this? And what kind of grip can it then have?

We fall away from willing power in our agent-values, in particular—that is, in the conscious aims and principles we try to live by. Nietzsche argues that these have come unhooked from the deep pursuit of power, and aim us at quite different and incompatible things. For agent-values are mainly set by morality, which aims them often directly against life as will to power. And yet, Nietzsche also thinks, that deep effort at power is somehow still operative even here. TI.v.5: 'When we talk about values we are under the inspiration, under the optic, of life: life itself forces us to posit values, life itself evaluates through us, when we posit values'. How can he have it both ways?

I suggest that Nietzsche relies here on a commonplace idea: the organism's deep directedness at power can support (motivate) agent-values that are hostile and damaging to power, because those values can seem to serve its power (though really they don't). So he posits an epistemic error, but posits it in an implicit and bodily will, that judges quite unconsciously in us, and sometimes judges wrong. Morality appears, to this implicit will, as if it furthers my life, but in fact it doesn't. By exposing how our agent-values conflict with that deep aim in us, he shows that we only hold them by an error.

Why do life-hostile values arise in the first place, if our deep aim is for 'more life'? Nietzsche has several complicated stories to tell here. But his principal idea, I think, is that values always originate in a person or people whose power they express (are meant to serve). However, these values can then be transmitted to other kinds of life for which they are decidedly not the means to grow. This transmission can happen by simple inheritance, or copying, or by compulsion or seduction. All our values originated as means to power, but the question is whose power. Our usual error lies in living by values designed in the interest of different kinds of persons than ourselves.

Even herd morality develops as a means to power—but it's the power of the social group. Selection favors societies that best subordinate members into an effective large group. It is because they favor the power of the group, that agent-values are settled as they are. Moreover, we should notice that it is in each case a particular group, a group organized on behalf of a particular kind of person. So Nietzsche's famous story about master and slave moralities describes how these two systems of agent-values express the interests (and will to power) of two different kinds and sets of individuals. It may often be that agent-values favor the power of a very different kind of person than myself.

Hence seeing life's essence as will to power reveals the underlying end, which all others were adopted as means to—though the latter's status as means has been missed or forgotten. Nietzsche puts the point so: 'Humanity has always repeated the same mistake: it has made a means to life into a standard of life / : so that instead of finding the measure in the highest enhancement of life itself, . . . it has used the means to a quite particular life to the exclusion of other forms of life, in short for the critique and selection of life / : i.e. the human finally loves the means for their own sake and forgets they are means: so that they enter his consciousness as goals, as standards for ends / : i.e. a particular species of

human treats the conditions for its existence as conditions which ought to be imposed as a law' [WP354 [1888]].<sup>34</sup>

The most basic types for whom values are designed, are ascending and declining life; which of these values, makes the crucial difference. When declining life values, it might seem not to aim at growth but at the decrease, decline, and even extinction of life. And sometimes Nietzsche puts it so. In TI.v.5 he says that 'the anti-natural in morality' is the value-judgment 'of declining, of weakened, of exhausted, of condemned life'; it is 'the décadence-instinct itself, that makes an imperative of itself: it says "be destroyed [geh zu Grunde]!"' Yet Nietzsche elsewhere insists that even these values that seem so starkly to deny and devalue life are made in the interest of life. GM.iii.11: 'It must be some necessity of the first rank that makes this species [the ascetic priest] that is hostile to life grow and prosper again and again, — it must be an interest of life itself that this type of self-contradiction should not die out.' Ascetic values make declining life bearable—help it to sustain itself, the next-best to growing; they let it cope with the pain associated with that decline.<sup>35</sup>

So in general moral values have evolved because they favor the power of the group, and the power of particular groups, groups of particular kinds of persons. There's still the question why I, if so 'deeply' motivated by will to power, would adopt or go along with these values if they don't serve my power. And the answer must be, I think, that I—or this deep judge in me—simply err. I judge (in my body) that the way to my progress must lie on the road I see all around me take—that my best chance to rise is to sign onto the shared norms too. Moreover these social values are even designed to

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<sup>34</sup> WP707 [1887]: 'This is my basic objection . . . against all Why's and highest values in previous philosophy and religion-philosophy. A kind of means has been misunderstood as end; conversely life and its power-enhancement has been reduced to means.'

<sup>35</sup> GM.iii.13: 'the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life that seeks with every means to hold its ground and is fighting for its existence; it points to a partial physiological hindrance and tiredness against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, fight incessantly with new means and inventions.' So 'the ascetic ideal is an artifact for the preservation of life'. It is the mark of a declining life that it values preservation—as a second-best to growth, currently denied it. So GS349: 'The wish to preserve oneself is an expression of distress'.

seduce the individual to think they are in his/her interest. They ‘infect’ a population in the way today attributed to ‘memes’.<sup>36</sup>

This, I suggest, is Nietzsche’s principal account how will to power is ‘essential’ to life—an account that shows how we can will things contrary to power, but also criticizes such contrary willing as resting on error. So what, in a nutshell, is his argument from life to values? What reason does he give me to revalue my agent-values by the criterion of power?

Nietzsche claims there is a bottom to my system of motives, and at this bottom an aim that invents and sustains all my further motives. But this deep aim—which is implicit and bodily—is subject to error in its selection of means. It is without words, itself, and can choose the wrong words (agent-values) to express itself. It misjudges morality as its best strategy for improvement. Nietzsche appeals to us to side with this underlying will, and to free it of the errors that make morality appealing to it.<sup>37</sup>

In what sense does this amount to an argument from facts to values? Nietzsche does indeed make a transition, in his argument, from a descriptive to a valuative way of ‘positing values’ (see the distinction at the beginning of §4). He describes a deep valuing in us of power; power is, in real fact, a value—for this valuing. He then uses this description to justify and promote his own values, and in particular his advice that we revalue our agent-values by the criterion of (whether they enhance our) power. What status does this argument give to his values, and that criterion in particular? Is it subject to the ‘open question’ objection?

Clearly the value of power depends on the (purported) fact that it is valued by this deep will. Power is not valuable ‘in itself’ or apart from that valuing; nothing is valuable in that way. I think Nietzsche’s firm anti-realism saps the open question argument of much of its usual force. If the question ‘agreed that x is valued, but is it valuable?’<sup>38</sup> is asking whether x has such intrinsic value, Nietzsche would reject it as incoherent. There’s no value to anything independent of its being valued—by some living things or

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<sup>36</sup> TI.ix.5 says that life-denying morality ‘is very dangerous, it is infectious, — it quickly grows in society’s morbid soil’.

<sup>37</sup> Hunt [1991] develops a related line: ‘all moralities are fundamentally vitalistic in the intentions that lie behind them’ [120-1].

<sup>38</sup> Similarly for ‘agreed that x is valued, but should it be valued?’.

other. So the question must instead suppose that whether x is valuable depends on some different valuing than this which values it. To apply this to Nietzsche's argument: 'agreed that power is valued in this deep way, but is it valuable?' asks why we should not instead privilege those viewpoints that do not value power, for example our moral principles. Nietzsche's answer is as above: those moral agent-values only matter to us because we deeply—but mistakenly—suppose they serve our power. When the anti-realism reduces the question to a choice between these viewpoints, he thinks the decision will favor that underlying will.

3. Now given this sketched argument from biological life to values, let's look more closely at how these values get applied. Surprisingly, I think, Nietzsche draws two quite different kinds of lessons. The first is obvious from what we've just seen: we're to revalue our (agent-)values using the standard of will to power, taken as the essence of life. But there's a second way he makes values from life, which is probably even more prominent in his texts: we're to judge values by whether they 'say Yes to life', i.e. by whether they're life-affirming. This seems like a quite different point, and it may be puzzling to see how much weight Nietzsche puts on it. I want to examine these two points and give an account how they operate together.

a) Let's start with the injunction to try to live so as to 'say Yes to life'—and to judge a person or viewpoint or values by whether they affirm or deny life.<sup>39</sup> So TI.x.5: 'Saying-yes to life [*Jasagen zum Leben*] even in its strangest and hardest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility in the sacrifice of its highest types — that I named Dionysian'. And EH.iii.BT.4: 'a new party in favor of life' will make possible a 'surplus of life on earth'; tragedy is the 'highest art of saying-yes to life'. Conversely Nietzsche attacks morality because it 'negates life' [CW.P], and Christianity as 'the denial of the will to life become religion' [EH.iii.CW.2].<sup>40</sup>

This lesson seems to belong to that simpler way of arguing from life to values, via the claim that life itself (rather than what it deeply values) is the good. It appears quite independent of the thesis that life is essentially will to power, since it seems one could

<sup>39</sup> I treat this affirmation of life more thoroughly in 'Nietzsche's Value Monism'.

<sup>40</sup> Re morality see also WP343 [1886-7], and re Christianity WP1052 [1888].

judge whether x affirms life, no matter what life might essentially be. But I think this independence vanishes as we look more closely.

Affirming (saying yes to) life is of course an attitude or perspective, but in Nietzsche's rich sense. It involves not just seeing or thinking, but also feeling, and most of all willing. Adequately affirming life must engage all these aspects, in an overall intending of life as good. It must view and 'think' life as good, but it must also feel it as good, i.e. take pleasure in it, as well as will it as good, i.e. pursue or promote it as an end. So 'saying Yes' doesn't happen in a cold or contemplative judgment, but only when the person's full faculties are engaged—engaged positively towards life.

But this overall pro-attitude must be towards life: for Nietzsche it's crucial that one 'say Yes' to life as it actually is. It's not enough to announce oneself 'on the side of life'—as we've seen that can mean almost anything. If you're in favor of 'life', by which you mean the eternal life of Christianity, you're not really 'life-affirming' according to Nietzsche. One needs to be at least approximately right about what life is. And life-affirmation is fuller, to the extent one more adequately faces life as it is. Hence this point, to be applied, depends on a specification of 'how life is', and this can only be, for Nietzsche, the specification of it as will to power. Surely it is as such that one must 'say Yes' to life, to do so in the fullest sense.<sup>41</sup>

Because affirming life involves both a) seeing it accurately, as it is, and b) effort on behalf of life, it is natural that this attitude should tend to be effective, i.e. actually promote or enhance life. Nietzsche, we may notice, tends to treat the life-affirming attitude as indeed furthering life, and the life-denying attitude as indeed harming it. BGE259: 'as soon one wills to carry this principle [refraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation and placing one's will on a par with that of someone else] further, even as basic principle of society, it immediately proves to be what it really is: a will to the denial of life, a principle of disintegration and decay.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Notice how life affirmation involves insight in EH.iii.BT.2: 'This ultimate, most joyous, most abundantly playful Yes to life is not only the highest insight, it is also the deepest, the most strictly confirmed and supported by truth and science.'

<sup>42</sup> EH.iv.7: 'This, the only morality that has been taught so far, the unselfing-morality, betrays a will to the end, it negates life in its lowest ground. . . . Definition of morality: morality — the idiosyncrasy of *décadents*, with the ulterior motive of revenging themselves on life — and successfully. I attach value to this definition. — '

Because affirming life is both (somewhat) accurate in its idea of life, and (probably) effective in furthering life, the notion cannot in the end be separated from the essential truth—Nietzsche claims—about life, that it is will to power. The latter is needed to specify or determine a) what life-affirming must view life as, and b) how it really does advance life. Without this privileging of one of life's manifold aims (and values), the idea of affirming or advancing life loses content—or its content is dispersed into the all-inclusive multiplicity of life: every attitude says Yes to life in its way, and every event advances it to some view. So Nietzsche's lesson to 'say Yes to life' leans hard on the will to power specification of life after all.

b) Let's turn now to this primary way Nietzsche uses life as corrective criterion, the straightforward route of judging by the standard of will to power, as the essence of life. This standard asks whether values advance/empower life, i.e. advance it in its essential end, which is power. Power gives the criterion for marking levels of life, higher and lower forms, and life that is ascending vs. life that is declining.

So WP254 [1885-6], after saying that study of the origin of values 'in no way coincides with a critique of them': 'what are our evaluations and moral tables of goods themselves worth [*werth*]?' What is the outcome of their rule? For whom? In relation to what? — Answer: for life. But what is life? Here we need a new, more definite formulation of the concept "life". My formula for it is: Life is will to power.<sup>43</sup>

The lesson—at least part of it—must be, to adopt life's end of power as our ultimate agent-value, as our conscious guide or criterion. We bring our agency into deliberate service of this end; we take power as our 'principle'. We think what to do by what will maximize power/growth; we operate with some kind of utility-calculus maximizing power. And whose power? It sometimes seems we're called to further the power of life generally, or of those we care about. But I think Nietzsche's dominant answer is that I am to aim at my own power.

What are the more particular implications of this? When Nietzsche stresses that it's power rather than survival that is life's end, one lesson seems to be that we should risk ourselves. Life's end is not to live as long as possible; the good isn't quantity of life

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<sup>43</sup> A2: 'What is good? — Everything that enhances people's feeling of power, will to power, power itself.'

in that sense. Indeed Nietzsche wants us to learn the Dionysian lesson that all growth involves destruction: life is self-overcoming. So GS26: 'What is life? — Life — that is: continually shedding something that wills to die; life — that is: being cruel and inexorable against anything that is becoming weak and old in us, and not just in us.'

I am to see that the point to life is growth, growth by overcoming previous states of myself. I am to set my sights explicitly on this meta-project, which subjects all my existing projects to a critical eye, under the aim to transform them. I now review and rethink all my practical rules and principles, asking whether they help or hinder this self-overcoming. I 'revalue' my values by asking whether they serve this ultimate task. I design myself a new set of values promoting this new end. Nietzsche's view again looks like a kind of consequentialism, with power—the individual's own power—as the good to be maximized.

**B.** And yet—I think this leaves out a whole side to Nietzsche's view of life and its bearing on values. Our focus on the biological(-phenomenal) notion of life, and our assumption that the lesson must be to revise our agent-values, have closed off a main side of his thought here. In this side he reaches out from debates over principles like the various consequentialisms (maximize pleasure vs. maximize power), to commend a different kind of stance altogether. This different stance is his answer to the conflict between his loves for life and for truth: it's what lets him subordinate the latter to the former. We can see this side by retrieving a different set (than in A.) of the points made in §§3-4, and applying them to our questions about the authority, criterion, and results by which Nietzsche argues from life to values.

1. Let's return to the authority of life. In A. we located this in the way life—biological life, understood as phenomenal or intentional—is the transcendental source of all valuing; since its basic valuing is of its own growth or power, life is in an extended sense the ultimate value itself. So the 'Life' that teaches Zarathustra would be the point of view at the bottom of all organisms: she speaks for and as them all. However, this reading fails to take account of two important points in §3's account of life.

The first point is the role of the body: more specifically the way biological life is built into each of our bodies. Earlier and simpler forms of life are deposited in my body,

as the drives operating all my physiological processes; my body is made up of these. So my body bears ‘biological life’ in a narrower sense, in which it means life that is merely biological (and not also agential). And this more narrowly biological life has a different kind of ‘authority’ in me, by this presence in my body. It has authority by its ‘depth’, we’ll see.

The second overlooked point is that ‘life’ can also mean personal life—the sense in which each of us lives ‘a life’. Many of Nietzsche’s references to life are to his own life. And, I suggest, in the two dancing songs of *Zarathustra* (though not perhaps in ii.10), the ‘Life’ that’s personified is meant to be Zarathustra’s own life. It’s this that he is in this intimate relation with, and not biological life in the abstract or generality. She stands for his own life as he knows he has it to live.

So notice just how Zarathustra engages with Life in these climactic passages. He engages with her in terms of his personal life—over the ‘existential questions’ in which he confronts the main character of his life. He thinks about his relation to (his) life in connection with his dominant passion, his ideal of wisdom or truth. And he thinks about his relation to life in connection with his death, the end of his life (‘you think that you want to leave me soon’). Both of these (death, his will to truth) pose challenges to his love of (his) life, but he is able to reconcile both with it.

Now does this mean that the biological sense of ‘life’, in which it applies to all organisms, is irrelevant here at the heart of his point? For presumably it’s only humans that have such ‘personal’ lives—mean themselves to be living a life<sup>44</sup>—so that if it’s only the latter that count, broader life would drop out of the picture. Yet we’ve just seen how a personal life involves biological life for Nietzsche: it’s built into each of us, in our body. This life I have to live, is lived as or in a body, and in my body I will as biological life generally wills.

2. But to see better how such personal and bodily life might have authority, we need to turn (again) to the criterion it supplies. This is of course power or growth, as A.

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<sup>44</sup> Or might Nietzsche suppose that all organisms have a rudimentary sense of themselves as living a life? They all will, after all, their growth/control, and might be sensitive too that some things will kill them. To be sure it’s implausible to suppose them to ‘look ahead’ so as to see their living is bounded into a (finite) life. But we should bear in mind that they indeed are designed—by selection—to live through a life-cycle, and are sensitive, physiologically, to ‘where they are’ in this cycle (life). So there may be a rudimentary ‘personal life’ in simple organisms.

has shown. But our personal and bodily life supplies this criterion in a different way than there appeared. To be sure, I suggested that Nietzsche promotes this criterion because of its ‘depth’ in us, but I didn’t develop how this depth reaches into our bodies, nor how the criterion comes to us from our bodies. We need to rethink how life ‘supplies’ this criterion.

We’ve supposed the criterion of power to have been extracted by philosophical argument from observation of life generally, via the claim that life’s ‘essential’ aim at power is ‘inescapably determining’—i.e. such that all values originate as means to it. Life gives the criterion as an object of our study: we examine her, and ourselves, and infer that power has this ultimacy; we then deliberately review the ethics and practical rules we’ve accepted, and revise them in view of that clarified end.

But this is too cold-blooded to be Nietzsche’s point (—there’s not enough life in it). Life isn’t passive object in his ‘argument’, but has a speaking role, and delivers her will to us more forcefully than via our study and inference. The way biological life is built into our bodies gives it a voice in them, and most of the trick will be to let it speak. We get the criterion not so much by inferences taken from our bodies and applied in our deliberations, as by giving the body more place in our lives—and principle-driven deliberation less.

The biological (in the narrow sense) life built into my body speaks with special authority because it has its principal allegiance to the power of the organism I am. As we’ve seen my agent-values have been constructed for different purposes—especially for the power of groups, and often groups of people very unlike myself. By contrast my drives, and the body-values they involve, are more reliably aimed at my power, growth, health. Of course they were laid down in the ancient past within organisms and in environments extremely different from my own. Still they preserve, even if very deep-buried, my organism’s aim at its own power. So these wills in my body—‘life’ there—speak in me for me, by contrast with the inherited ‘value-tables’ generally expressing the power-interests of others.

Indeed it is by this judgment in my strong bodily drives that I finally identify what ‘power’ is. Definitions like ‘growth in control’ need to be replaced by that judgment: its unstudied taste is the compass for this power. And so ‘I’, as a deliberative agent

consciously choosing for worded reasons, learn to submit to the ‘self’ that values and judges in my body.<sup>45</sup> I learn to defer to a taste in my body, a taste Nietzsche often represents as a sense of smell. I encourage my passions, trusting their judgment better than the most careful conclusions of moral reasoning—suspicious as I now am of the design of that reasoning power. Z.i.3: ‘Listen rather, my brothers, to the voice of the healthy body: a more honest and purer voice is this.’ Z.i.4: ‘There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom.’ And WP124 [1887]: ‘That one gives back to humans the courage to their natural drives [*Naturtrieben*]’.<sup>46</sup>

This is not to say that agent-values can play no role. The body may not be healthy—may have no sound taste for its interests. Or it may express a ‘declining’ line and lack vigor to grow. In some such cases, maybe even in most, Nietzsche is convinced that nothing can be done. But most of us are mixtures, healthy in some drives (or moods) but not in others, sometimes feeling the way to grow, to be more alive, but other times not. For most of us our deepest drives and aims are healthy, and track power. Indeed I think Nietzsche supposes that if one goes deep enough one will always find a healthy will, a will that does aim at power. This was one of the points we saw he meant by will to power’s ‘depth’—its ineliminability.

If there are enough such resources in the body, agency can help to realize them—once it learns (is trained) to set itself to that task. But to learn this is very hard, because it goes quite against the grain of agency’s long-standing design. Our agency has a designed-in bias against the drives; its first instinct is to distrust and suppress them. I—the agent—need to use this insight about life’s essence to identify what’s healthy in my (bodily) self, and to exert whatever effective force my agency can have to favor it. This is why Nietzsche addresses us—in part at least—as agents, giving reasons that are to work in our deliberating: in the expectation that his explicit lessons for us can help us where it counts. Persuaded by his argument from life, we can use the concept of power to favor the right side, and build up our more-aiming drives. Still, it’s only in the

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<sup>45</sup> (See this contrast between ‘I’ and ‘self’ in Z.i.4.) WP343 [1886-7]: ‘My insight: all the forces and drives by virtue of which there are life and growth, are covered by the ban of morality: morality as instinct of the denial of life. One must destroy morality, in order to free life.’

<sup>46</sup> EH.ii.9: ‘That one becomes, what one is, presupposes that one is furthest from suspecting what one is. . . . One must keep the whole surface of consciousness — consciousness is a surface — clean of all great imperatives.’ TI.ii.11: ‘so long as life is ascending, happiness equals instinct’.

working of those drives themselves, and not grasp of the concept, that we truly see what life's end is.

This reconfiguration of the relation between our agency and our bodily drives is Nietzsche's response to the problem we've seen he was long obsessed with: the conflict between his will to truth, and his life or living. It is the adjustment that allows the will to truth, with its inherent asceticism, to function helpfully in the person. This will gives up the reins. It grants authority to the drives, but can do so willingly because it sees that even its own aim, truth—above all the truth about life—needs to be accomplished in these drives.

3. We can see the results of applying this criterion, so supplied, by returning to the idea of life-affirmation. We concluded above that this had little to contribute to Nietzsche's argument from life to values. But this was due to our focus on agent-values: we presumed that the argument meant to change our principles. I think the idea of life-affirmation works in that other, personal and bodily side to Nietzsche's thought; this is why it's needed as complement to the arguments about will to power. Filling out this life-affirmation brings us to the bottom of his points.<sup>47</sup>

Even though the lesson 'say Yes to life' relies on and runs into the lesson to agent-value power, it includes an emotive or affective aspect not present in agent-valuing—and also not present in the agent-principle to maximize power. I suggest this is the key reason Nietzsche so often puts the point this way. Saying Yes to life is a matter not just of a positive judgment, but of (something much like) loving it. It shows that the lesson must be learned in a personal and bodily way.

It is to stress the engagement with personal life that Nietzsche so often describes the revaluative process in his own case—as he has managed it in the living of his own life.<sup>48</sup> This personalizing of his ideas of course culminates in *Ecce Homo*, which presents the new ideal as it is found and embraced within an individual life. The point of this personalizing is not to relativize the ideal to Nietzsche himself, but to display how the

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<sup>47</sup> Here I agree with Reginster [2006, 228]: 'We truly "understand" him only when we understand what the affirmation of life amounts to.'

<sup>48</sup> Conway [2006, 539]: 'most of his specific references to self-overcoming pertain to the developmental trajectory of his own life'.

ideal needs to be appropriated: not propositionally, and not just consciously and deliberately, but in a way that engages the whole organism, drives and all.

This is also one reason Nietzsche wrote *Zarathustra* as he did. The drama about Zarathustra sets our attention on the personal: the ideas are events in an individual's life, and are, in their crucial points, responses to his awareness of living his own one life. Although this character is of course a rather distant persona, we are invited to enter into it, and to experience the drama and teachings first-personally. Similarly, we may take the book's poetizing as an effort to speak to the body—to feeling and to primitive effort. It appeals to the judgment of the deep will in our body, whose taste is sensitive to a different kind of argument or evidence.

Nietzsche expresses this affective point most dramatically in those culminating passages of *Zarathustra* describing the hero's love for (personified) Life. This love is much more than the kind of 'affirmation' involved in believing that life is good. We've already seen how the drama emphasizes the personal sense of 'life': Zarathustra is engaged reflectively with his own life, before death and in the light of his dominant project and passion (towards truth). He loves this his life in a way that contains and guides that passion: he pursues it out of this love for his life. This love is itself a passion, as it were a meta-passion, a passion for passions. As a passion, it belongs to his body.

The drama presents Zarathustra's love for life as erotic. It is inspired by and directed at life's beauty, not its truth or moral rightness. So this love of life involves an aesthetic sensibility and judgment.<sup>49</sup> We apply this artistic sensibility, as artists themselves usually don't, to our lives, so that as Nietzsche famously puts it in GS299: 'we, however, will to be the poets of our lives, first of all in the smallest and most everyday things.' This poetic work on one's life is carried out not in a deliberate way—it's not a precious effort to be picturesque. Rather it's run by that passion for life, aimed at enhancement, that judges and arranges the other passions, including that for truth. It arranges them into a life it favors by its own inarticulate taste.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> In my [2004, ch. 4] I try to show that Nietzsche thinks of sexuality as the evolutionary root of our aesthetic responsiveness.

<sup>50</sup> GS290: 'One thing is needed. — To "give style" to one's character: a great and rare art!' Nehamas [1985, 185ff.] treats this idea famously.

Zarathustra's embrace of eternal return, the ultimate saying-Yes to life, takes place only in confrontation with the existential structure of his own life: it's this life whose return he affirms.<sup>51</sup> And he only accomplishes this embrace by a struggle fought in his body, and suffered physiologically, as described in iii.13 ('The Convalescent').<sup>52</sup> So Nietzsche's test for life-affirmation—whether one can will this return—needs to be met with regard to one's personal life, and at the level of one's body-values.

Although *Zarathustra* makes the point about life 'just' metaphorically, it locates the point where Nietzsche felt it most strongly. The personification of Life as the object of sexual love stresses both the existential-personal sense of life, and the need to respond to it in one's bodily taste and feeling. It expresses the emotive relation to one's living that Nietzsche principally advocates. We can't simply apply these lessons about life's ends to our values 'from outside': we need to uncover and activate these life-ends in ourselves (in our bodies), and arrange a cooperation between them and our agential valuing.

**In sum:** I've tried first to analyze the elements in Nietzsche's notion of life—biological, human, phenomenal, personal, poetic—then to show a) how these elements are synthesized in his complex notion, and also b) how the different parts function together in the crucial argument he makes, that 'life' supports or justifies his values.

We saw how the claim that 'life is will to power' seems to make the argument depend on a quasi-metaphysical claim about all biological life. But the weight of Nietzsche's point runs at a more personal level: biological life is important not so much for its generality as for its depth in each of us. Biological life is represented in our bodies, by our drives, which ultimately aim us at power. Such life (aiming at power) has authority, as criterion for judging values, because of this bodily presence in each of us. It is the undermost valuing in us, aimed at our individual good, which is growth.

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<sup>51</sup> The focus is also on personal life in GS341: 'What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it . . . "'.

<sup>52</sup> '[H]e collapsed like a dead man and lay for a long time like one dead. But when he came to himself again, he was pale and trembling and remained lying down, and for a long time he wanted neither food nor drink.' [iii.13] Nietzsche thought of himself as having undergone a decisive illness and then convalescence in his 'middle', positivist period.

Our agent-valuing, by contrast, was shaped by social processes whose aim is to tame and herd us (turn us into good citizens). It pretends to be our freedom, the better to so socialize us. We should revalue these agent-values by diagnosing this hidden design. But the point of this revaluation is not just to change the content of our agent-values, but to change the role of agency in us—its own relation to body-values. This is the role of the poetic personification of Life in *Zarathustra*, and its insertion in a sexual drama.

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