The Fanatic and the Last Man

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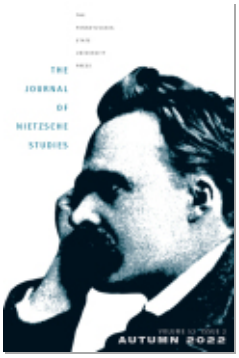

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The Fanatic and the Last Man

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Abstract: Suppose we accept Nietzsche's claim that critical reflection undermines our evaluative commitments. Then it seems that we are left with a pair of unappealing options: either we engage in critical reflection and find our evaluative commitments becoming etiolated; or we somehow immunize certain evaluative commitments from the effects of critical reflection. Nietzsche considers both of these paths, labeling the person who results from the first path "the last man" and the person who results from the second "the fanatic." I consider Nietzsche's analysis of these two character types, discuss why he thinks that in modernity these are the options with which we are faced, and ask whether Nietzsche thinks that there is a third way.

Keywords: fanatic, last man, conviction, devotion, will to power, affirmation

I want to describe a tension in Nietzsche's thought, but not only in Nietzsche's thought. It is a tension that pervades our thinking about the relation between *commitment* and *evaluative critique*. Here is one way of describing it.

On the one hand, we admire the devoted, wholehearted person of principle. Consider some captivating examples, often cited as portraits of integrity: Socrates; Antigone; Thomas More; Martin Luther; or, for some Nietzschean examples, Goethe, Napoleon, perhaps Wagner. These people adopt immensely difficult goals and carry on unconflicted and whole, utterly committed to their tasks. They are willing to sacrifice for their goals. They are willing to set aside material comforts and conventionally valued goods. While many of them suffer awful fates, this has no impact on their devotion to their goals. And they tend to see their goals as providing their lives with a source of significance, meaning, or purpose. If you told Martin Luther that his life lacked purpose, he would laugh in your face (or perhaps, more likely, pen some vitriolic denunciation of you).

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We can detect two dimensions in these portraits of integrity. There is a *practical* dimension: these people are motivationally committed in a way that many of us envy. We might describe this by saying that they are not alienated, fragmented, disunified, or akratic. All of these terms can be analyzed in different ways. But what they pick out is the sense in which the people I have mentioned are unconflicted. Their *whole being* is behind what they do. And this shows in their pursuits: they are able to pursue great challenges, to surmount obstacles, to strive without wavering. They persevere despite adversity.

But there is more. There is also an *epistemic* dimension. These people enjoy a sense of justification for their actions. Sometimes, this takes the form of unreflective certainty: their commitments seem to them so obvious that the thought of needing to justify them never arises (Antigone is an example). But even if they do reflect on the justificatory standing of their commitments, they see them as warranted. They see themselves as doing what they must: "Here I stand, I can do no other," says Luther. These people are utterly confident in their evaluative judgments. So, whereas I might waver between two options, unsure of which is better justified, whereas I might doubt even my deepest commitments, whereas this uncertainty might lead me to compromise or attenuate my goals, these agents do not waver. They are evaluatively confident. If you told Antigone that she should contravene her duties to her brother, she would be unmoved.[1]

So these agents, these portraits of integrity and devotion, display two features: they are wholeheartedly and unwaveringly committed to some end; and, if they were to engage in justificatory reflection about the end, this would not destabilize or attenuate the end. But this form of wholehearted confidence often comes at a price. Consider how one-sided Antigone is: Hegel famously describes the way in which she is captured by a dilemma that cannot be reconciled in her own evaluative framework.[2] Consider how stubborn and dogmatic Martin Luther is. Or take Thomas More: Why *not* just go along with Henry's claims about the invalidity of his marriage, rather than die for the sake of some illusory duties to a fictitious God? When you pose these sorts of questions, the individuals I have mentioned can look *far* less appealing. They can look like *fanatics.* Thomas More, though often presented as a portrait of integrity and conscience, had six individuals burned at the stake; as Hilary Mantel puts it in her fictionalized portrayal, More "would chain you up for a mistranslation.

He would, for a difference in your Greek, kill you."[3] And Martin Luther, who might look admirable when he says, "Here I stand, I can do no other," also urges us to "smite, slay and stab, secretly or openly" the "poisonous, hurtful," and "devilish" peasants, the "mad dogs" who contravene Luther's own beliefs.[4]

In short, while these people may sincerely believe that they enjoy decisive justifications for their commitments, they are wrong. They are confused, taking the most questionable of commitments as indubitable. A more open-minded, better informed, more philosophical person would question these commitments. And once they start questioning those commitments, it is natural to think that the commitments would be attenuated. Thomas More might burn you at the stake for a mistranslation of the Bible, Luther might stab or smite you for a religious difference, but a less confident, less dogmatic individual wouldn't.

So the wholehearted, uncompromising devotion that we admire in some agents can be attenuated by critical reflection. And that attenuation can go *very* far. I won't argue for this point, but I think by now it is clear that there can be no noncircular, presuppositionless justification of fundamental evaluative claims. The idea that we can offer an ultimate justification for our deepest values is an illusion. It is a tempting one, one that has gripped philosophy almost from its outset, but every attempt to provide an ultimate justification for a unique set of values has failed.[5]

But if that is right—and certainly Nietzsche thinks that it is right—then *every* case of wholehearted commitment can be undermined by critical reflection. It doesn't matter what the particular content of your commitment is, for there is no content that can be justified in a presuppositionless manner. When I think about my deepest commitments—to philosophy, to egalitarian values, to political freedom, to my loved ones—I cannot convince myself that I would be able to offer a skeptic-proof justification of these commitments over competing alternatives. I can give partial justifications, of course, but they always bottom out in something that I cannot defend, something that I cannot justify. As Nietzsche puts it, "the deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear!" (*KSA* 11:25[505]).[6] Critical reflection cannot take us *to* any particular fundamental commitments, but it can take us away from all of them. Foucault gives memorable expression to this idea, writing that "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting."[7]

The worry, then, is that in a culture that demands critical justification of our central commitments, *all* of our central commitments, all of our important goals may become enervated. Nietzsche's image for this—as I will explain below—is the last man. The last man may be perfectly content with the humdrum business of everyday life. He won't burn you for a mistranslation—he won't burn you for *anything*. He is easygoing, shying away from conflict, but also from challenge. He doesn't understand struggle, commitment, devotion. He drifts along, content but uninspired, with no real goals. He is at home in the world in the same way that a dog is: docile, obedient, content to lounge in the sun and come running for dinner.

And that brings us to our problem. In the modern age, we want two things. We want principled, wholehearted commitment, but we also want this commitment to be impacted by critical reflection. Can we have both? Can we somehow preserve wholehearted commitment without foregoing critical reflection?[8]

This is one of Nietzsche's central concerns. Nietzsche wants critical reflection; the call for it echoes through all of his works. He heaps effusive praise on those who "sacrifice all desirability to truth, every truth, even plain, harsh, ugly, repellent, unchristian, immoral truth—For there are such truths.—" (*GM* I:1). Nietzsche tells us that "at every step one has to wrestle for truth," and this "requires greatness of soul: the service of truth is the hardest service" (*A* 50; see also *A* 54). And again:

> How much truth does a spirit endure, how much truth does it dare? More and more that became for me the real measure of value. Error (—faith in the ideal—) is not blindness, error is cowardice. Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, follows from courage, from hardness against oneself, from cleanliness toward oneself. (*EH* P:3)

There can be no serious doubt that Nietzsche urges us to engage in deep and thoroughgoing critical reflection.[9]

And yet Nietzsche worries about where this critical reflection will take us. If critical reflection denudes commitment, turning us into last men, then perhaps we are forced to choose. Do we have to limit critical reflection, remaining perhaps "superficial out of profundity," recognizing that attempts to pursue critical reflection will destabilize all forms of commitment?

And if so, are those who persevere in commitment driven to a form of fanaticism, in which wholehearted, passionate commitment is divorced from critical reflection? Are we, in short, forced to choose between the last man and the fanatic?

That is the question I want to address. In the first section of this article, I clarify the way in which critical reflection can undermine commitments. I argue that while critical reflection needn't affect everyday values, it does pose a problem for highest values. The second section analyzes Nietzsche's last men, whom I interpret as lacking highest values while maintaining everyday values. The third section considers Nietzschean fanatics, whom I interpret as possessing highest values but at the cost of a form of dogmatism. The fourth section argues that Nietzsche would condemn both the fanatic and the last man, though for different reasons. And the fifth and final section explores the possibility of maintaining resolute commitments without anchoring them in highest values.

How Does Critical Reflection Affect Evaluative Commitments?

To begin, we need to draw a distinction. I have suggested that critical reflection undermines or weakens evaluative commitments. But we should qualify that point. After all, in one sense values are completely resistant to critical reflection. Our affects and drives engender evaluative orientations toward the world. When I am desperately hungry, I value food, and my perception of the world reflects this valuation: I salivate at the sight of the pastries, I hurry along toward the grocery store. When I am walking in the woods and startle upon a bear, I am scared: every movement is salient, I am attuned to every sound, I value my own life with an urgency that is usually absent. *Those* kinds of values are unlikely to dissipate under critical reflection, at least for anyone with a normal affective profile. The drives and affects grounding them are too powerful; the costs of acting against them too high.[10]

What might dissipate, however, is *highest* values. Not all of our values are on par. We take certain values to override others. For example, you might think that considerations of justice always override considerations of pleasure. Then justice would be lexically prioritized over pleasure. Or, to take an example from the ancient world, you might think that considerations of glory always override considerations of self-preservation. (Achilles wants

to be first of the Greeks; whether he dies achieving this status is immaterial.) Or an example from Christianity: devotion to God is taken to override considerations of pleasure and comfort, requiring us to set aside material goods in order to serve God.

So, some values enjoy a lexical priority over others. Consider the values at the top of these lexical orderings. Those have a good claim to the title "highest value," for they are the values for which all other values must be sacrificed and exchanged. For the consistent Christian, devotion to God is the highest value; for the consistent Schopenhauerian, freedom from suffering is the highest value; for the consistent Homeric Greek, glory is the highest value. These highest values are lexically prioritized over other values. But they tend to have additional features. For one thing, they tend to be associated with *existential significance*. Consider *GS* 1, entitled "*The teachers of the purpose of existence*":

> At present, we still live in the age of tragedy, in the age of moralities and religions. What is the meaning of the ever-new appearance of these founders of moralities and religions, of these instigators of fights about moral valuations, these teachers of pangs of conscience and religious wars? [. . .] It is obvious that these tragedies, too, work in the interest of the species, even if they should believe that they are working in the interest of God, as God's emissaries. They, too, promote the life of the species by promoting the faith in life. "Life is worth living," each of them shouts, "there is something to life, there is something behind life, beneath it; beware!" [. . .] Life ought to be loved because—! [. . .] The ethical teacher makes his appearance as the teacher of the purposes of existence in order that what happens necessarily and always, by itself and without a purpose, shall henceforth seem to be done for a purposes and strike man as reason and an ultimate commandment [. . .] (*GS* 1)

Here, Nietzsche claims that a crucial feature of religions and moralities is that they provide an explanation or meaning for otherwise meaningless events. Presumably, they do so by providing highest values. The basic point is clear enough: Nietzsche thinks that religions and moralities provide some way of sorting both whole lives and particular actions into the

meaningful and the meaningless. Take his central example: traditional forms of Christianity hold that devotion to God renders one's life meaningful in a way that devotion to material ends cannot. So there is a classification of actions (and, by extension, the patterns of action embodied in whole lives) into the meaningful and the meaningless, where the meaningful lives or acts are suitably related to highest values. For one who accepts highest values, a life devoted to mundane values will seem deficient and worthless.

Of course, there is widespread disagreement on *what sorts of things* render one's life meaningful. Perhaps it is not devotion to God, but freedom from suffering, that renders life meaningful (Nietzsche interprets Buddhist views in this way). Or perhaps anything that enlivens life, that seduces people to live life to the fullest, is enough to render life meaningful (Nietzsche's claims about the Olympian gods seem to make this point). But the point is that we answer these questions about meaning, significance, or purpose by appealing to highest values. In that sense, highest values tend to have existential significance.

The highest values also tend to provoke and sustain a set of powerful emotions. Nietzsche claims that "every ideal presupposes love and hatred, veneration and contempt" (*KSA* 12:10[9]). He expands on this in another passage: "How manifold is that which we experience as 'moral feeling': in it there is reverence, dread, a touch as if by something holy and mysterious, in it is the voice of something commanding, something that takes itself more seriously than we do; something that elevates, kindles, or brings calm and profundity" (*KSA* 12:1[22]).[11] These highest values are experienced as inescapably demanding. Their demands structure our emotional responses, provoking feelings of dread and despair when we contemplate violating them. This is clearly not the case with ordinary values: no dread, no reverence arises when I value a good nap or a pleasant vacation.

Finally, highest values tend to be difficult to realize. As Nietzsche puts it, these are "the highest values in whose service man was supposed to live, especially when they governed him with great difficulty and at great cost" (*KSA* 13:11[100]).[12] Difficulty isn't a necessary feature: it is conceptually possible for one's life to be arranged in such a way that fulfilling one's highest values requires no struggle whatsoever. But this is vanishingly rare. After all, life daily presents us with cases in which one value can be sustained only by sacrificing another. Highest values demand sacrifice of other values, overriding them. Maintaining commitment to them tends to be costly.[13]

In sum, then, highest values can be understood as those that enjoy lexical priority over other values, answer existential questions, are associated with a characteristic repertoire of emotions, and tend to be difficult to realize.[14]

Let's return to the point with which I began this section. I claimed that ordinary values won't be disrupted by critical reflection. But now I want to point out that highest values *will be*. Highest values work best when they are unquestioned, when they operate as background assumptions taken as obvious, when they are not seen as contingent or in need of justification because they are not even identified *as* assumptions.[15] But they can be identified, and once they are identified they can be questioned. And once they are questioned, we need some story, some justification, something that will show them to be legitimate.

Why are highest values prone to destabilization by critical reflection? We count someone as having a value merely in virtue of their manifesting a certain affective and dispositional profile, and reflection needn't destabilize this. Many of these profiles are drive-inculcated, resistant to amelioration, and sometimes deeply entrenched. But having a highest value involves lexically prioritizing it over other things and seeing it as imbued with special significance. This demands the exclusion or overriding of relevant alternatives. So, once those alternatives are presented as live options, it takes work to maintain the highest value.

Here is a simple illustration. Suppose I am a committed Christian and accept an ascetic valuation such as this: I ought to subordinate my own flourishing in order to serve God. But then I reflect; I start to question my devotion to God. Skeptical arguments about the existence of God as well as the plurality of competing evaluative perspectives lead me to doubt, and I can no longer see an adequate justification for prioritizing devotion to God over all else. It is natural to think that my commitment will be attenuated. After all, the commitment is *costly*, requiring sacrifice and renunciation. If I come to see sacrifice and renunciation as needless, a typical reaction would be to attenuate or abandon it. Again: "the deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear!" (*KSA* 11:25[505]).

So highest values are susceptible to disruption by perceived lack of justification. But let me be clear: I don't mean that these values will be abandoned as soon as they are questioned. That's false. I can doubt but remain fully committed. Nor do I mean that everyone who questions their highest values and comes to doubt their standing will attenuate their commitment to these values. Again, that's false: some will remain committed despite doubt, as I will

explain below. In general, though, perceived lack of justification for a highest value will tend to denude commitment to the value. Would Luther still risk his life if he doubted? Would Antigone die if she recognized that she is in the grip of an unfounded and self-contradictory ethical system? Probably not. At the very least, there is a question here, the sort of question that wouldn't arise for the more trivial values. In short, because highest values are costly, they are problematized by lack of perceived justification. While perceived lack of justification might not lead the agent to abandon the value completely, it would tend to undermine one's degree of commitment to the value.

The Last Man

I have argued that highest values are undermined by critical reflection in a way that ordinary values are not. Let's now imagine a culture in which the demand for critical reflection has gone very far indeed, so that all candidate highest values are perceived as problematic and indefensible. For many of us, religious ideals are undermined: we can no longer take them seriously as live possibilities. Just so, we can imagine a culture in which putatively secular highest values have also been problematized.

What would this look like? What would it be to lack highest values? Nietzsche gives us a model for that: the last man. Here is his description:

> The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest. "We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. [. . .] Becoming sick and harboring suspicion are sinful to them: one proceeds carefully. [. . .] One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion. No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels differently goes into a madhouse "Formerly all the world was mad," say the most refined, and they blink. [. . .] One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled—else it might spoil the digestion. One has one's little

> pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health. "We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. (*Z* Prologue 5)

Notice a few crucial things. First, the last man has plenty of ordinary values: he values comfort, warmth, happiness, lack of quarrel, good digestion, and so forth. Second, the last man lacks highest values. The last men don't understand struggle, quarrel, devotion, effort. Indeed, they find anyone driven in these ways mad, claiming that in the past "all the world was mad." Third, the last man avoids "exertion" or "work" or struggle. Any end that requires exertion is derided.

The last man is content with the ordinary business of everyday life. She doesn't dwell on questions of purpose or meaning. She isn't devoted to anything; indeed, Nietzsche emphasizes the way in which she doesn't even understand *how* anyone could be devoted to anything. She blinks, passively going along with life. Rather than More, dying for the sake of his religious commitments, or Napoleon, devoting himself to the machinations of power, we should picture the easygoing modern individual who spends his time watching television, chatting with friends, and clocking into his job. His life may not be thrilling, but it's also not horrific. Why not simply go along with things and enjoy what life brings to you? Why not take it easy? To be sure, you might miss out on some adventures—the last man's life won't have the highs and lows of More's life. But if we flatten the heights, we might also reduce the lows.

For Nietzsche, though, there's something wrong with these people. Nietzsche (through the character Zarathustra) says that the last man is "the most contemptible [Verächtlichsten] human being" (*Z* Prologue 5). He expects us to be appalled by the last men (even while we recognize ourselves in them). But why?

I think there are two possible answers. Maybe the last men are despicable because they lack highest values. Or maybe they are despicable because they lack the capacity for devotion to difficult ends. Those two features are connected, of course. Part of what it is to have a highest value is to be devoted, for highest values require the subordination of other values and pursuits. So highest values require devotion. But in a moment I will suggest that the other direction of entailment does not hold: we can manifest devotion without highest values. More on this later. For now, we can say that the

last men are presented as despicable, either because they cannot manifest devotion, or because they lack highest values, or both.

The Fanatic

Now we can contrast the last man with his opposite, the fanatic. The fanatic is uncompromisingly and wholeheartedly devoted to some end, cause, or ideal. He is willing to undertake immense sacrifices in order to attain or preserve it. He is willing to impose great costs on others. He is the very opposite of the last man.

The study of fanaticism has a long history in philosophy: although neglected today, it was a central topic in early and late modern philosophy, with everyone from Voltaire to Shaftesbury to Locke to Hume to Rousseau to Kant to Hegel offering accounts of it. With some exceptions, these philosophers tend to treat fanaticism as involving three features: (1) unwavering commitment to some ideal or cause; (2) the unwillingness to subject that commitment to standard forms of critical reflection; and (3) the presumption that one enjoys some distinctive, non-rational form of justification for that commitment (such as divine revelation or mystical insight into the nature of reality).[16] The fanatic, in short, is someone who is devoted; doesn't subject his devotion to what we would regard as genuine critique; and, if he reflects on his devotion, is absolutely certain that his devotion is warranted. In light of this, the fanatic is willing to impose his values on others, even at great cost.[17]

So, where the last man lacks any real commitments, vacillates between options, and doesn't understand ideological conflict, the fanatic displays unwavering commitment, single-mindedness, and self- and other-sacrificing commitment to an ideal. If we put this into our terminology: the fanatic has a highest value to which he is utterly devoted.

But how does that work? How does the fanatic manage to preserve highest values? In the Enlightenment account, the fanatic does so by replacing one form of justification (rational reflection) with another (claims about revelation or metaphysical insight). A good form of justification is replaced with a spurious form of justification. And this helps to explain why Nietzsche thinks fanaticism is a pathology of modernity. Simply put, suppose Nietzsche is right that critical reflection undermines all extant highest

values. If you want to preserve a highest value, you need to insulate it from critical reflection. One way of doing so is simply by ignoring justificatory questions. Another way is by concocting some spurious justification for the value. The fanatic does the latter. She manages to hold on to a highest value, but only by warping her critical faculties.

One complication in my account is that I have elsewhere argued that Nietzsche departs from the standard Enlightenment account of fanaticism (which endorses features (1)–(3) above). I think Nietzsche sees fanaticism as distinguished by a form of *ersatz* strength that conceals a deeper form of weakness, specifically a form of *fragility.* The fanatic is *rigid*, and this rigidity is motivated by fragility: his identity is so deeply tied to a particular perspective that he is unable to detach from that perspective without experiencing this as a loss of self, so that all calls to consider other perspectives, to acknowledge other perspectives as legitimate, and so on are perceived as threats. So features (1)–(3) are symptoms of a deeper problem. Or, put differently, the Enlightenment account of fanaticism mistakes a symptom of fanaticism for fanaticism itself. I address this at greater length in other works;[18] for present purposes, these complications will not be immediately relevant.

Assessing These Character Types

Nietzsche notes that religions and moralities have been the traditional homes of highest values (*GS* 1). But, as the ensuing sections of *GS* demonstrate, religions and moralities are collapsing. So the highest values are at risk of collapse as well. Like the other "shadows of god," they will linger for a while but may fail. Stepping back from *GS*, we can make that point more straightforwardly. It is tempting to think that the ideal valuer would be committed just insofar as and to the degree that she takes there to be a sufficient justification for her commitment. If Nietzsche is right that critical reflection destroys highest values while leaving regular values intact, then the commitments of ideal valuers will be devitalized. There will be no ends, goals, activities, relationships, or people that seem to merit this form of unconditional commitment.

So, by pursuing critical reflection unreservedly, we would get the last man. That's not to say that the last man himself has to be highly critical. He can be quite superficial. But he picks up on the prevailing ethos, which

sees higher values as unjustifiable. (Thinking that the last man has to be highly reflective in order to be impacted by his culture's emphasis on critical reflection is like thinking that the medieval Christian has to engage in theological reasoning in order to be impacted by his culture's commitment to Christianity.) The fanatic, by contrast, preserves highest values by insulating them from the effects of genuine critique. And that's another strategy: if reflection destroys value, we can preserve a value by becoming dogmatically resistant to reflection's effects. In short, then, we have two unappealing alternatives. The last man cannot manifest or even understand devotion and lacks highest values, but enjoys an easygoing, docile existence. The fanatic manifests highest values and devotion, but is epistemically problematic and prone to violent divisiveness.

Let us now think about how Nietzsche would assess these two character types. To assess them, we need to employ some standard of assessment. Although there is disagreement about the exact nature of Nietzsche's evaluative stance, there is one point that should be uncontroversial. In his late works, Nietzsche endorses an evaluative standard that centers on life and will to power. This is stated explicitly in *A*: "what is good? Everything that heightens in human beings the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself" (*A* 2). But that passage is far from unique; appeals to life and power are ubiquitous in Nietzsche's later works. Nietzsche constantly assesses individuals, cultures, values, and moralities in terms of whether they represent ascending or declining life.[19] The details of Nietzsche's approach are controversial, but the general idea should not be. And the general idea can be stated quite simply: everything that enhances or promotes Life is to be affirmed; everything that undermines or diminishes Life is to be rejected.

That leaves questions, of course. What is Life? What counts as enhancing or diminishing Life? Again, Nietzsche's general answer is clear enough even if the specifics are legitimate matters of dispute. Life is will to power. As he puts it, "the essence of life" is simply "its will to power" (*GM* II:12); "life itself" is a striving for "power" (*A* 6); "the will to power" is "the will of life" (*BGE* 259), for "life is simply will to power" (*BGE* 259; see also *Z* II: "Self-Overcoming," *BGE* 186, *GM* P:6–7, *A* 6, *KSA* 13:14[82]). Thus, Nietzsche asks, "What are our valuations and tables of moral values really worth? What results from their rule? For whom? With regard to what?—Answer: for life. But what is life? Here a new, more definite version of the concept 'life' is needed. My formula for it is: life is will to power" (*KSA* 12:2[190]).[20] Life is will to power. This needn't mean that power is maximally realized

in every instance of life. Just as the Darwinian might say that life aims at reproductive fitness without this being contradicted by the fact that most living things do an absolutely terrible job at fulfilling this aim, without it being contradicted by the fact that vast numbers of creatures die without reproducing, without it being contradicted by the fact that there are other aims living creatures have that countermand or diminish or conflict with this aim, so too Nietzsche can say that life aims at power without denying that all kinds of living things do a terrible job of realizing that aim, without denying that all kinds of living things actively oppose that aim.[21]

So, in short, Nietzsche's ethical theory centers on the idea that will to power is the standard of assessment. But what is will to power? In my work on this topic, I have adopted Bernard Reginster's original understanding of will to power. Although Reginster now has a different view,[22] he originally claimed that willing power is aiming to encounter and overcome resistance. And I agreed.[23] But I now think my agreement was too quick. Will to power *does* involve encountering and overcoming resistance. But it also involves *growth*. This point has been explored by Ian Dunkle, John Richardson, and others.[24] We might put the point this way: synchronically understood, to will power is to engage in an activity that involves striving to encounter and overcome resistance; diachronically understood, to will power is to grow in one's capacity to overcome the relevant forms of resistance. An agent can manifest will to power synchronically without manifesting it diachronically.[25]

I won't provide a defense of those claims here since I think they are fairly obvious in the late works, and in any case the works cited above contain detailed defenses. What I want to do is something else: to think about how those claims would bear on Nietzsche's repudiation of the last man, his analysis of the fanatic, and his attraction to certain forms of devotion.

The key idea is quite simple. The last man isn't committed to anything. But will to power is promoted by commitment. Indeed, you might think that will to power *requires* commitment. This is particularly true if we conceive of will to power as aiming at growth. You can't grow in your capacity to manifest some activity without remaining committed to that activity. Think again about the devoted individuals I mentioned, or think of Nietzsche's own examples (Goethe, Napoleon, and others). Those people are the very images of devotion: they strive, they persevere in the face of immense challenges. What's essential about them is their *restlessness*: they are the very opposite of the last men in that they perpetually strive.

Of course, devotion can be directed at the wrong ideals. St. Paul is an example: it's hard to think of anyone more devoted than him, but the particular ideal to which he is devoted is life-denying and otherworldly. Or, take Wagner: again, there's no question that he excels on the devotion dimension, but his ideals are (Nietzsche comes to think) pernicious. So there are two separate questions that we can ask about Nietzschean exemplars. We can evaluate people (or their actions) in terms of the *degree to which they manifest power.* And, because any expression of power will be in the service of some more particular end, we can evaluate people (or their actions) in terms of *the content of the ideals toward which they strive.* The best case would be to fulfill both dimensions: maximal manifestations of power in the service of life-enhancing or life-affirming ideals. But the bad cases can take different forms: maximal manifestation of power in the service of a pernicious ideal; minimal manifestation of power in the service of an exemplary ideal; or minimal manifestation of power in the service of a pernicious ideal. And of course each dimension is degreed: the extent to which an ideal is life-denying can vary, and the extent to which an agent manifests power can vary. So we have a spectrum that looks like this:

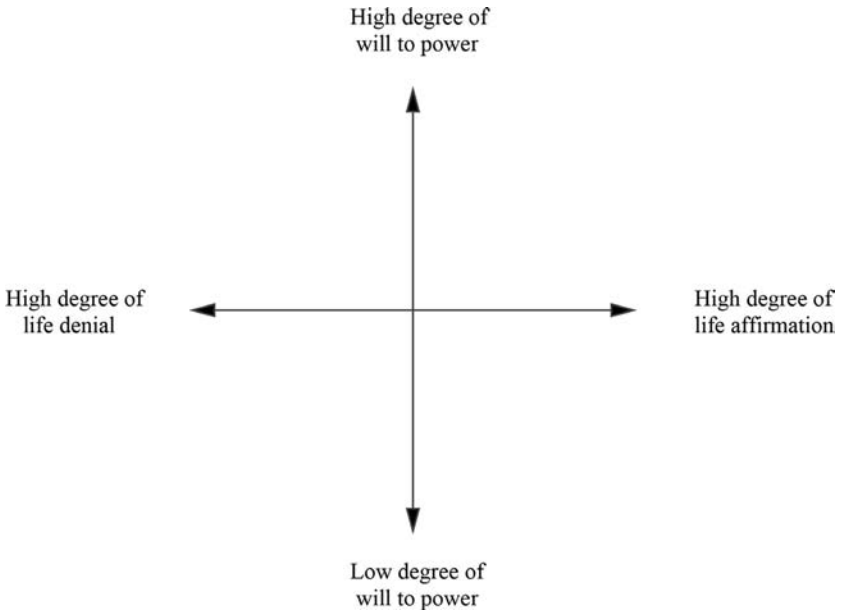

Fig. 1 | Life affirmation and denial relative to power.

The way I have set up this figure is open to dispute. What I have presented as two dimensions—will to power and life-affirmation, which are independent—is treated by some as one dimension. Tom Stern, for example, thinks that being life affirming just is expressing high degrees of power.[26] I won't try to rebut that reading here; I merely point out that there is no obvious reason for attributing it to Nietzsche, given that he regularly presents individuals (such as St. Paul and Wagner) and groups (such as ascetic priests in antiquity) as manifesting high degrees of power while being life-denying. (There is a relationship between affirmation and will to power: life-negating ideals will tend to undermine will to power as growth, and hence a configuration in which a life-negating ideal is coupled with maximal will to power will tend to be *unstable*. This is part of Nietzsche's point about the ascetic priests in *GM* III: they initially manifest a great deal of will to power, but they direct this at contents that are in the long run power-reducing. While will to power and affirmation are thus interrelated, it's important to be clear that they are conceptually distinct and come apart.)

So let's assume that there are (at least) two dimensions in Nietzsche's evaluative space. The best cases are in the extreme top right. That's where we would locate Nietzsche's exemplars: Goethe, Napoleon, and Beethoven, for instance. But Nietzsche will criticize anyone and anything that falls short of that quadrant. Thus, St. Paul is in the extreme top left quadrant. The last man is somewhere near the bottom, perhaps even in the bottom right. His ideals needn't be particularly pernicious. He may even affirm quotidian life, at least in the sense that he immerses himself in the everyday business of living. But he lacks devotion. So, in terms of the vertical dimension—the extent to which he manifests power—he is deficient.

What about the fanatic? The fanatic could be at the top right. If his ideals were life-affirming, his devotion to them would land him in that quadrant. So, is that Nietzsche's ideal? To be fanatical toward life-affirming ideals? No; for there are two further problems with the fanatic. The first is that the fanatic is deficient in his capacity to be truthful with himself. The second is that the fanatic manifests a form of weakness.

The first point is easier to understand. Nietzsche claims that the fanatic is the person of convictions (*A* 54; *HH* 227). And a conviction, Nietzsche tells us, is "the belief that on some particular point of knowledge one possesses the unconditional truth" (*HH* 635). The fanatic "wards off the demand for reason" (*HH* 227), utterly convinced that he is correct. And for this reason

"convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies" (*HH* 483). A lie is at least potentially responsive to epistemic considerations, whereas a conviction is not. Thus, the person of conviction is "the antithesis, the antagonist of the truthful man—of truth" (*A* 54).

In light of this, suppose we add a third criterion of assessment: truthfulness. Nietzsche says that Zarathustra's doctrine posits truthfulness as the highest virtue (*EH* "Destiny" 3). And Nietzsche rejects those who do not "consider it contemptible to believe this and that and to live accordingly, without having first given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterward" (*GS* 2). So we could imagine that Nietzsche's exemplars would be maximally truthful, maximally powerful, and maximally affirmative—with the problem being that these ideals tend to cut against one another.

The second point is more difficult. Isn't the fanatic strong? Well, Nietzsche suggests that there is a sense in which fanaticism conceals a deeper form of weakness. He tells us that

> fanaticism is the only "strength of the will" that even the weak and insecure can be brought to attain, being a sort of hypnotism of the whole system of the senses and the intellect for the benefit of an excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling that henceforth becomes dominant—which the Christian calls his faith. Once a human being reaches the fundamental conviction that he must be commanded, he becomes a "believer." (*GS* 347)

As I mentioned above, Nietzsche treats fanaticism as ersatz strength attained through rigidity. What might look like admirable devotion is in fact a fragile, grasping attachment. Notice that this type of weakness is different than an inability to manifest power or grow in power through one's actions. The fanatic can strive for incredibly difficult ends and continuously grow in his capacity to realize them. But his *identity* is fragile; he is one-sided, unable to detach himself from his own perspective. In that sense, he lacks strength.

So we seem to have four dimensions of assessment: power, affirmation, truth, and strength. Again, I think it's clear that Nietzsche operates with all of these forms of assessment. There are questions about whether some can

be reduced to others, whether some are more fundamental or more important than others, and so on. For example, you might think that the normative status of truth and strength can be understood in terms of how they relate to will to power. I think this is probably right: I think Nietzsche tries to understand the valuation of truth and strength in terms of power. So, on my reading, there would be two non-derivative Nietzschean values, power and affirmation. Some think that even affirmation can be understood as rooted in facts about power, though I myself think these are distinct criteria. But I will not pursue those questions here. The important point, for our purposes, is that the last man and the fanatic both realize certain Nietzschean ideals at the expenses of others, and are consequently deficient.

An Alternative?

So far I have traced two pathologies of modernity. Once traditional sources of meaning collapse, once we accept the idea that we should apportion our commitments to the results of critical reflection, we find two possibilities: our highest values dissipate and we are left with the bovine contentment of the last man; or we cleave to certain values by blocking critical reflection and thereby become fanatics. But now I want to ask: Is there a third way?

Notice something about the last man and the fanatic: both of them link devotion to highest values. The fanatic can be devoted only by treating something as a highest value, by rendering some ideal unquestionable and inviolable; the last man cannot treat anything as a highest value, and hence finds himself incapable of devotion. But does devotion actually require highest values? Highest values provide a ground or justification for particular instances of devotion. But what if you could manifest devotion without seeing it as so anchored, without seeing it as in need of an external ground, without seeing it as problematized by lack of justification?

Suppose you are devoted to some object, ideal, end, project, or relationship. Call the object of devotion O. In order to maintain devotion to O without highest values, several things would be needed. First, you would need to give up the idea that your devotion to O can be justified in terms of some universally applicable highest value. So, when presented with the need to sacrifice in order to sustain devotion to O, you wouldn't be able to justify this by presenting O as more valuable than what it excludes. Moreover, you wouldn't be able to justify or explain your devotion to those who disagree

with it. Choosing O over some alternative object of devotion (or over not being devoted at all) would not be viewed as something for which you can cite adequate justification. Moreover, you wouldn't be able to see your devotion to O as demanded by your circumstances, for you wouldn't see the value as universally applicable. Is this possible?

On an individual level, this kind of devotion is certainly possible. Nietzsche himself is one example: presumably he does not see his devotion to his philosophical projects as rationally mandated or anchored by highest values. And yet his devotion is plain: his whole being, his whole life manifests a profound and unwavering commitment to philosophical inquiry. But how does that work? Why remain committed to a project that demands sacrifice, that invites challenge, if you can't really see yourself as having any reason for prioritizing it over other things? Why (in Nietzsche's case) toil through the isolation and headaches and nausea and pain, why do all of this when you are unread and unnoticed? Why not give up and devote yourself to something more trivial, something less demanding?

Here is a response, one that I explore more fully in *Philosophy of Devotion*: we appeal to affirmation. Of course, there are many complications concerning how exactly we should interpret Nietzsche's remarks on affirmation and how they connect to his notion of eternal recurrence. But I believe most interpreters would agree that Nietzsche would accept the following claim:

> If a value, activity, end, or relationship is *affirmable* by a person, then the person making an informed choice would choose it again.[27]

Affirmation might require *more* than this—for example, insofar as we identify Nietzschean affirmation with the ability to joyfully accept the notion of eternal recurrence, affirmation might require that we be delighted by the hypothetical thought of something's recurring endlessly without variation. And it might require thinking about life as a whole, rather than particular elements within an individual's life. These subtleties won't be relevant for our purposes: the quite minimal notion of affirmation that I have outlined above will be sufficient.

Consider how this minimal notion of affirmation relates to devotion. If I can affirm my devotion to, say, philosophy, then this entails that I would choose it as a profession again. I would choose it again *despite* the fact that

I cannot regard it as justified over competitors or alternatives, despite the costs that it imposes, despite the lack of external anchoring, and so on. And I think that is our answer: rather than trying to *justify* our devotion to some ideal, we try to *affirm* our devotion. The activity to which we are devoted, though it cannot be seen as best, though it cannot be justified as superior to others, is one that we can affirm. We would choose it—and the life it makes possible—again. And this potentially secures it.

Is there a social or cultural model for this? Even if individuals can sometimes manage to manifest devotion without anchoring their devotion in anything external, can societies or cultures do so? In one way there *cannot* be a social or cultural extension, because extending this model to a social/cultural level would require positing potential communal objects of devotion: highest values. Insofar as these highest values were presented as universally *binding*, we would be back to the fanatic. Thus perhaps:

> In any event, whatever kind of *bizarre ideal* we may adopt (e.g. as a "Christian," a "free-thinker," an "immoralist" or a German citizen), we should not demand that it be the *ideal*; for then it would be deprived of its character as a privilege or prerogative. We should distinguish ourselves from others, *not* equate ourselves with them. How is it that, all this notwithstanding, most idealists propagandize for their ideal without further ado, as if they would have no right to the ideal if it is not acknowledged by *all*? [. . .] real heroism consists [. . .] *not* in fighting under the banner of self-sacrifice, devotion and disinterestedness, but in *not fighting at all* . . . "That is the way *I* am; that is what *I* want—and *you* can go to the Devil!" (*KSA* 12:10[113])[28]

So, Nietzsche cannot think that there are rationally mandated communal objects of devotion. Of course, we could back off from that claim and consider presenting certain highest values or certain objects of devotion not as universally *binding* but as universally *available* or universally *permissible.* To cite examples from the above passage, we could say: you can be a free spirit or an immoralist or a German, you can treat that as your ideal, you can be devoted to it, but you won't be able to demand that it function as the only permissible object of devotion. On this model, we would have a plurality of competing ideals.

It is sometimes thought that this kind of pluralism about permissible ideals is Nietzsche's solution. Rather than seeing one highest value as mandated, we have a buffet of available options. Each option is viewed as permissible but none is required. You can choose one or several or none. We can rule out some of the potential objects of devotion by pointing to the way in which they undermine will to power: thus, perhaps, we rule out being devoted to Christianity. But this still leaves many possible options: you can be a free spirit or an immoralist or a German or a writer or an explorer or a composer or a businessperson or a doctor or whatever, and you can devote yourself to that.

While this "buffet" model has an initial appeal, it faces a problem: pluralism potentially denudes commitment. The availability of diverse ideals potentially undermines the aggregate capacity for commitment to any one of them. For, once alternative ideals tempt us, the epistemic demand suggests that we need some justification of our own ideals as superior. This needn't take the form of foundational justification from presuppositionless premises. But it does seem sensible to ask, of two permissible ideals, why we should adopt one in preference to the other. If it makes sense to devote myself to philosophy and also makes sense to devote myself to watching television, what justifies the struggle and sacrifice and challenge attendant on the former? We might expect the aggregate devotion to the former to dissipate; we might expect people to default toward the more easily attained ideals.[29]

I think this is a deep problem, and perhaps not one to which Nietzsche has an answer. But a full exploration of this point would require us to examine Nietzsche's attempts—always fraught and conflicted—to establish cultural ideals and to search out aestheticized supports for communal ideals. And that is a topic for another occasion.

Conclusion

I began this article by suggesting that a deep tension pervades our thinking about commitment and evaluative critique. On the one hand, we admire people who manifest firm and unshaking commitments; on the other, we admire those who apportion their degree of commitment to the results of evaluative critique. In theory, these could be compatible: if evaluative reflection led us to a unique set of justified values, we could simply embrace those

values wholeheartedly and meet both demands. That is the Enlightenment dream. But, for familiar Nietzschean reasons, things do not work out that way. Evaluative reflection undermines and problematizes values. No values escape. So we seem to be left with a dilemma: we can be last men, with denuded commitments; or we can be fanatics, with resolute commitments that are insulated from the effects of critical reflection.

Is there a way out? Nietzsche suggests that there is. The above dilemma arises when we link devotion to highest values, seeing devotion as problematized when it is not secured by highest values. But what if we could maintain devotion without highest values and without thereby lapsing into fanaticism? I have suggested that this is possible on the individual level: in striving to subject our devotion both to critical reflection (primarily in terms of will to power) and to the quest for affirmation, we can potentially secure devotion. We would thereby avoid being either fanatics or last men. I have closed by suggesting that while this strategy is possible on the individual level, it is more difficult on the social and cultural level. *You* can choose not to be a fanatic or a last man; but perhaps *your culture* is condemned to promoting either the rigidity of fanaticism or the dissipation of the last men.

NOTES

This article was originally delivered as a keynote address at the Third Biennial Meeting of the North American Nietzsche Society (NANS) in Atlanta, scheduled for 2020 but postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, held on October 15–16, 2021.

1. As Hegel describes her: "there is no caprice and equally no struggle, no indecision, . . . on the contrary, the essence of ethical life is for this consciousness immediate, unwavering, without contradiction" (G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 465). That is, when she acts the individual experiences complete certainty that she is fulfilling her duty in action. We can picture this by imagining individuals who are so deeply identified with their obligations that they experience any call to deviate from these obligations as a perversion of their own essence. See Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 471: "The ethical individuality is directly and intrinsically one with this his universal aspect, exists in it alone, and is incapable of surviving the destruction of this ethical power."

2. As Hegel puts it, "That consciousness which belongs to the divine law [that is, Antigone] sees in the other side only the violence of human caprice, while that which holds to human law [Creon] sees in the other only the self-will and

disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority" (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 466). So an "antithesis" arises, with neither side able to comprehend the other (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 467).

3. Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009), 140.

4. Martin Luther, "Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants" (1525), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, Robert C. Schultz, and Joel W. Lundeen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967).

5. In earlier work, I argued that Nietzsche treats *will to power* as a non-optional evaluative standard. As I see it, Nietzsche's philosophical psychology—specifically his notion of *Trieb*—entails that we are committed either to valuing power or to experiencing a particular kind of internal conflict. This is compatible with my claim that Nietzsche denies the possibility of an ultimate justification for a unique set of values. For Nietzsche's claims about power, as I interpret them, do not yield a commitment to a *unique* set of values. While Nietzsche can rule out certain values as incompatible with power, he does not seek to identify some uniquely privileged set of values. For discussion of these points, see Paul Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

6. Citations of Nietzsche's works refer to the following editions: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966); *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974); *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. W. Kaufmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1969). When translations of *KSA* passages are available, I have cited either *The Will to Power*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (New York: Penguin, 2017) or *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner and trans. Kate Sturge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); otherwise, translations are my own.

7. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 88.

8. For a discussion of related issues in the context of Nietzsche and Weber, see Tamsin Shaw, "The 'Last Man' Problem: Nietzsche and Weber on Political Attitudes to Suffering," in *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*, ed. Manuel Knoll and Barry Stocker (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 345–80. Shaw argues that Nietzsche and Weber are interested in whether we can sustain commitment to non-hedonistic ends once traditional religious structures collapse. According to Shaw, while commitment to hedonistic ends is unproblematic in a modern context, commitment to non-hedonistic ends is imperiled. The threat to non-hedonistic ends arises from the fact that they raise questions about the justifiability of suffering; those questions received answers in religious contexts but are potentially more difficult to justify in a secular context. While Shaw's discussion is illuminating, I think her hedonistic/

non-hedonistic distinction is off target. The primary problem posed by the last men does not involve a contrast between hedonistic and non-hedonistic ends; it is, rather, a problem of *commitment*. Nietzsche wants to know whether we can maintain commitment to difficult ideals absent traditional sources of justification. This is orthogonal to the question of whether the commitments are hedonistic or non-hedonistic; even hedonistic ideals can be objects either of dissipated, irresolute commitments (as in the last men), or objects of devoted, resolute commitment.

9. Of course, there are complications: Does he want *everyone* to engage critically with their evaluative and theoretical beliefs? Probably not: "To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion what one is [. . .] this can express a great prudence, even the supreme prudence: where *nosce te ipsum* [know thyself] would be the recipe for ruin, forgetting oneself, misunderstanding oneself [. . .] become reason itself" (*EH* "Clever" 9). Or again: "There are books that have opposite values for soul and health depending on whether the lower soul, the lower vitality, or the higher and more vigorous ones turn to them: in the former case, these books are dangerous and lead to crumbling and disintegration; in the latter, heralds' cries that call the bravest to their courage" (*BGE* 30). And there are *many* similar passages. I won't address these complications here.

10. For a detailed discussion of Nietzschean drives, affects, and their role in agency, see Paul Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

11. Translated as *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 55.

12. Translated as *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 219.

13. Here I disagree with John Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 243. Richardson treats highest values as distinguished by their difficulty: "the last human lacks 'higher values'—values that are hard to achieve, that open up differences among people." As I see it, not every value that is difficult to achieve counts as a highest value, and in certain circumstances highest values may not be difficult to achieve.

14. I discussed some of these features in Paul Katsafanas, "Fugitive Pleasure and the Meaningful Life: Nietzsche on Nihilism and Higher Values," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1 (2015): 396–416. I now think that in this essay I didn't distinguish clearly enough between essential and inessential features of highest values. See Paul Katsafanas, *Philosophy of Devotion: The Longing for Invulnerable Ideals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming) for a revised and more detailed discussion, which also connects highest values to empirical work on sacred values.

15. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

16. Hegel is an outlier: he analyzes fanaticism in terms of an excessive concern with abstract generalities, which leads the individual to bear a destructive relation to particulars. As Hegel puts it, fanaticism is "enthusiasm for something

abstract—for an abstract thought which sustains a negative position toward the established order of things. It is the essence of fanaticism to bear only a desolating destructive relation to the concrete." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. (New York: Wiley, 1900), 358. I think Hegel's account is deeply insightful, touching on issues that will later be described as a fixation on *purity*. But that is a topic for another occasion.

17. For more on this, see Paul Katsafanas, "Fanaticism and Sacred Values," *Philosophers' Imprint* 19 (2019): 1–20.

18. Katsafanas, "Fanaticism and Sacred Values," and *Philosophy of Devotion.*

19. For a few of the many examples, see *GM* P and III:11; *Z* II: "On Self-Overcoming"; *BGE* 2, 13, 44, and 293; *TI* "Problem of Socrates"; *TI* "Morality as Anti-Nature" 1, 4, and 5; *TI* "Skirmishes" 33 and 35; *TI* "Ancients" 4–5; *CW* P; *A* 2, 5–6, 63; *EH* "Destiny" 7–9.

20. Translated as *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 95–96.

21. This point is so obvious that I am reluctant to emphasize it, but for some reason the idea that there is a conflict between saying that life aims at maximal power and saying that many living things thwart that aim is continuously raised in the Nietzsche literature. But this is absurd. It is like complaining to a hedonist: you cannot say that everyone seeks maximal pleasure, because many people fail at that aim or do things that countermand that aim or even deliberately seek displeasure. And the hedonist would reply: of course they do! They are confused and have contrary motivational states, false beliefs, ideologies that lead them astray, misperceptions, and so on. That is the *point* of the theory—you wouldn't need to develop a hedonistic ethic if our hedonistic motivations were guaranteed to succeed.

22. Bernard Reginster, "The Will to Power," in *The Nietzschean Mind*, ed. Paul Katsafanas (London: Routledge, 2018), 105–20.

23. Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*.

24. Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values*; Ian Dunkle, "On the Normativity of Nietzsche's Will to Power," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 51.2 (2020): 188–211.

25. Dunkle understands growth as follows: "WP as Will to Growth: When a person, A, is persistently motivated to take up a series of similar pursuits, P1 . . . n, of some general object, O, A often becomes motivated to take up similar pursuit Pn+1 that involves the confrontation of greater resistance to O than P1 . . . n, and to acquire the abilities required to reach O by way of Pn+1" ("On the Normativity of Nietzsche's Will to Power," 204). Or, a bit later: "WP as Will to Growth: Humans are generally motivated to grow in their effectiveness as agents—specifically to acquire and express an increase in ability to attain those ends they otherwise pursue. We are disappointed by failure to achieve our goals—revealing failure to have grown in our ability to overcome the obstacles to its achievement. We are also disappointed by achieving a goal which turns out

to be easy for us, which also fails to reveal our growth in the ability to overcome such obstacles" (207).

26. Tom Stern, *Nietzsche's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

27. I say "informed" choice to rule out cases in which affirmation is based on mere superficiality, ignorance, and so forth.

28. Translated as *The Will to Power* §349.

29. See Katsafanas, "Fugitive Pleasure and the Meaningful Life" and *Philosophy of Devotion* for further arguments to this effect.