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IN WHAT SENSES ARE FREE SPIRITS FREE?¹

Christa Davis Acampora

My broadest claim in this article is, unsurprisingly, that there are multiple senses of freedom associated with the *freedom* of the free spirit. These include both positive and negative senses – that is, when describing how free spirits are *free*, Nietzsche sometimes characterizes this as *freedom to* do something, and sometimes as *freedom from* certain kinds of constraints. In this article, I do not aim to provide an exhaustive catalogue of the different senses invoked in Nietzsche’s ‘free spirit’ texts. Instead, I wish to highlight some particular senses, including some that are less frequently discussed in the scholarly literature and account for how these differing senses are related, including some puzzling ideas that Nietzsche appears to hold regarding how these different senses might be realizable simultaneously. In thinking through this, I believe, we are presented with ideas that bear on Nietzsche’s views about freedom more generally.

¹This text originated as a presentation at the Warwick Nietzsche Workshop: The Philosophy of the Free Spirit, March 2012. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the British Academy, the University of Warwick Philosophy Department, and Keith Ansell Pearson, the workshop organizer. I also developed some of the ideas here in discussion with audiences at Stony Brook University and those in attendance at the *Nietzsche in Assos* conference in Assos, Turkey, July 2013.

I. WHAT ARE FREE SPIRITS FREE FROM? A SENSE OF NEGATIVE FREEDOM IN NIETZSCHE

We can begin with one of the most obvious senses of freedom of the free spirit, and perhaps one that at least some people think of as the primary (or, even exclusive) sense in which free spirits are free: namely, in terms of being *free from* certain claims of society, particularly those regarded as customary and binding. As Nietzsche begins to develop the notion of the free spirit in those works designated as part of a series on the free spirit, Nietzsche carefully works through how customs claim – as well as make possible – individuals. This binding force is exploited by morality, which has a variety of tactics for shaping and molding both the psychic and physical forms of human existence. In this respect, morality makes a particular kind of common life possible while it establishes terms for distinction that make one recognizable as an individual, either through exceptional realization of the positively esteemed way of life or by virtue of one standing out from it.

At times, the freedom of the free spirit is at least partially constituted by his or her (or perhaps *its* – if we don't think free spirits are actual people or even a type of person but rather spiritual forms that can be realized at various times and to various degrees) ability to loosen, if not escape, these bonds. Nietzsche sometimes talks about this feature as a step, sometimes as an initial or at least early stage in a developmental process of becoming a free spirit,² and later he designates some as 'free, very free spirits'. Free spirits are contrasted in Nietzsche's texts and in the scholarly literature with various kinds of so-called 'fettered spirits'. The free spirits are envisioned by Nietzsche as not *bound* to the morality of custom, convention, superstition, or even morality itself and the habits of thinking (or not thinking) and valuing that characterize such views. Free spirits are, minimally, free of *this*. In short, they have a certain kind of independence that fettered spirits lack.

One form of such independence that Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes is independence or freedom from association: solitude, being able to with-

²For a developmental account of the free spirit, particularly in relation to Nietzsche's views about science and culture, see Jonathan Cohen, *Science, Culture, and Free Spirits: A Study of Nietzsche's Human, All-Too-Human* (New York: Prometheus, 2010).

stand a lack of human companionship. There are quite a few passages in which solitude is described in a sense that suggests at least one of the ways Nietzsche conceives it is in terms of being free *from* (so we have another negative sense of freedom), the demands of others, being free from obligations, associations, and their influences.

This is particularly evident in *Beyond Good and Evil* in the final section of the part titled ‘Der Freie Geist’:

At home, or at least having been guests, in many countries of the spirit; having escaped again and again from the musty agreeable nooks into which preference and prejudice, youth, origin, the accidents of people and books or even exhaustion from wandering seemed to have banished us; full of malice against the lures of dependence that lie hidden in honors, or money, or offices, or enthusiasms of the senses; . . . we are born, sworn, jealous friends of *solitude*, of our own most profound, most midnightly, most middaily solitude: that is the type of man we are, we free spirits!³

And further, in *GM* I.7, where Nietzsche writes:

Every philosopher would speak as Buddha did when he was told of the birth of a son: ‘Rahula has been born to me, a fetter has been forged for me’ (Rahula here means ‘a little demon’); every ‘free spirit’ would experience a thoughtful moment, supposing he had previously experienced a thoughtless one, of the kind that once came to the same Buddha – ‘narrow and oppressive’, he thought to himself, ‘is life in a house, a place of impurity; freedom lies in leaving the house’: ‘thinking thus, he left the house.’

³Citations of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* are drawn from Walter Kaufmann’s translation of *BGE* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) and Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale’s translation of *GM* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

This is obviously not the only purpose or benefit of solitude as Nietzsche sees it, and it is a topic that warrants its own discussion, but it is certainly an evident strand in Nietzsche's thinking about the respect in which the free spirit is free. Free spirits to some extent appear to be negatively free of others, communally and individually.

If we look at how Nietzsche compares and contrasts free spirits with fettered ones, as Bernard Reginster does in his article on Nietzsche and fanaticism,⁴ then we see that the free spirits are also free from a certain kind of relationship to truth. To be sure, they care very much about the truth, and this motivates what they question and how. But they have a somewhat different relation to truth. This suggests, if the analysis holds, that free spirits are free in ways that might differ from their free-thinking Enlightenment counterparts. For they, too, certainly prized truth and also might be thought to value 'thinking for oneself' in ways which, on the face of it, would appear congenial to Nietzsche's views, but Nietzsche is quite clear that his free spirits are distinctive. We see this quite clearly in *BGE* 25, where Nietzsche points to Bruno, and by implication to Nietzsche's own contemporary free thinkers who idealize him as their forefather. Bruno (1548–1600) is the sort of figure who we might imagine would have appealed to Nietzsche. Bruno was martyred for his support of the ideas of Copernicus. He was shunned from nearly every academic community on account of his opposition to Aristotle; he advanced the view that the world was eternal and ever-changing, and he anticipated a theory of relativity in his arguments against Aristotle's notions of opposites: 'There is no absolute up or down, as Aristotle taught; no absolute position in space; but the position of a body is relative to that of other bodies. Everywhere there is incessant relative change in position throughout the universe, and the observer is always at the center of things.'⁵ In a play he wrote, which evokes themes of satyr plays, Bruno features the 'ass of Cyllene', which skewers superstition. The 'ass' is everywhere, not only in the church at the time of the ass festival (and at other times) but also in all other public institutions,

⁴Bernhard Reginster, 'What is a Free Spirit?: Nietzsche on fanaticism,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 85, no. 1 (2003): 51–85.

⁵Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt: A history* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), p. 294.

including the courts and the schools.⁶ Bruno was a skeptic, particularly about theological matters where scientific reasoning offered evidence that contradicts matters of faith, and he was an advocate of free thought.

It would seem that Bruno would be a good model for a free spirit. And he was – but *not* the sort that Nietzsche appears to be advocating. Bruno was an icon for the ‘free thinkers’ (*Freiedenken*) movement, with which Nietzsche explicitly contrasts his free spirits in *BGE* 44. Some context related to the composition of the text is helpful. Nietzsche finished *BGE* in early summer 1885. During the period when he was writing the text he spent time in Venice, a home of Bruno. While Nietzsche was in Venice, a group of notable figures formed an international committee to erect a monument to Bruno on the site of his execution in Rome. The committee included Victor Hugo (cf. *TI* ‘Skirmishes’ 1), Herbert Spencer, Ernest Renan (cf. *TI* ‘Skirmishes’ 2), Ernst Haeckel, Henrik Ibsen, and Ferdinand Gregorovius. So if we want to know who it is that Nietzsche targets when he talks about the wrong kind of free spirits, we might explore these. The statue of Bruno was eventually erected in 1889.

At least part of Nietzsche’s opposition to his contemporary free thinkers, particularly those who take Bruno as an icon, focuses on the fact that the martyrs to truth evince a kind of unconditionality that ultimately imprisons, fetters perhaps, with even more grave consequences than those who otherwise shirk Enlightenment ideals. Truth at any price – even when used to oppose superstition and the Christianized worldview – might be thought to replace one god with another. It seems clear that Nietzsche thinks his own free spirits are also free from this, or they at least strive to be such – they are oriented toward a kind of *freedom from unconditionality*, including – perhaps especially – with respect to their valuation of truth.

There are two features of this idea of freedom-from-unconditionality that I wish to underscore in characterizing the freedom of the free spirit. Negatively, the free spirit is detached from a particular commitment to truth – in advance of and even in the face of some reasons to believe otherwise. The free spirit is free from *compromising* commitment. But there is

⁶Kathleen Marie Higgins, ‘Nietzsche and the Mystery of the Ass,’ in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R Acampora (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 100–119.

still more to be done in order to clarify just what it is that might be compromised in the absence of such independence, something to which I return below when examining some of the positive senses in which free spirits are free. In addition to being free from such commitment, Nietzsche's free spirit is free from a certain kind of accompanying feeling – namely, that linked with a need to produce the feeling of power in this unusual way, even to the point of extinction as those who are martyred for it. Reginster argues for this view: namely, figures Nietzsche regards as fettered spirits (particularly the so-called free spirits Nietzsche anticipates replacing), draw a sense of their own power from their subjection to the immensely binding force of unconditional commitment. By tying themselves to the unconditional valuation of truth, they gather a sense of themselves as joining or being a part of such manifestations of power. Yet another characterization of a negative sense of freedom for the free spirits is that they are *free from* this particular need, to produce the feeling of power (which Nietzsche thinks all beings seek) in this particular way.

At the same time that this condition might be thought of as liberating, it presents us as readers of Nietzsche with a bit more trouble. Since all beings strive for and take pleasure in the feeling of power, it remains to be seen how Nietzsche's free spirits actually do pursue and experience this feeling, if not through binding themselves to unconditional commitments, and consider whether the alternative bears any structural resemblance to that associated with the fettered or 'so-called' free spirits. Put more simply, and Reginster does not explore this, I wonder whether the relation between freedom and unfreedom that characterizes the experience of power for the so-called free spirit is structurally similar in the case of Nietzsche's free spirit. The particular kind of fettered spirit we are considering in this case unconditionally binds himself to truth, and in so doing (by becoming bound) he realizes and finds his freedom or at least an indicator of his freedom. Is Nietzsche's free spirit simply unbound in a way that the so-called free spirit is not? All of these ways in which the free spirit is *free from* – the ways in which the free spirit has freedom in a negative sense – might appear to suggest as much, but there are positive senses of freedom that the free spirit realizes or to which it aspires, and I will suggest that these perhaps similarly require certain kinds of binding as well.

2. POSITIVE SENSES OF FREEDOM FOR FREE SPIRITS

In the discussion of negative freedom of free spirits, I underscored their independence, a feature Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes, and I explored some of the things in relation to which the free spirit is independent. I now wish to look more closely at a key passage in which Nietzsche describes this feature of free spirits to inquire precisely about that from which the free spirits are free. Looking for this source negatively also provides some clues about the positive sense. Here too Nietzsche's conception of independence gains some complexity and subtlety that require more reflection than what is sometimes found in the secondary literature. The passage is *BGE* 41, still in the section on 'The Free Spirit', where Nietzsche writes:

One has to test oneself to see that one is destined for independence and command – and do it at the right time. One should not dodge one's tests, though they may be the most dangerous game one could play and are tests that are taken in the end before no witness or judge but ourselves.

There are many questions that arise here, but I want to focus on the term translated here as 'independence': *Unabhängigkeit*.⁷ Literally, this is a state or condition of being unattached. But simply *unattached* might suggest something a bit too casual. I think a stronger translation in the English is warranted, and this stronger sense facilitates a somewhat different understanding of the *kind* of independence Nietzsche is talking about here. *Auf Deutsch*, *Abhängigkeit* is the term used for dependence (so it is clear how *Unabhängigkeit*) yields an appropriate translation as 'independence.' The 'un' negates the 'dependence'. *Unabhängigkeit* is a negative condition: to be not in a state of dependence. While *Abhängigkeit* can be used to talk about dependence in a positive sense of cooperation, is it also used to describe another specific kind of dependence that was becoming an object of increasingly intense scrutiny both culturally and biologically in Nietzsche's day, namely the kind of dependence found in contexts of *addiction*.

⁷This passage is discussed in its context, elaborating some of the same points below, in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil: A Reader's Guide*, which I co-authored with Keith Ansell-Pearson (New York: Continuum, 2012).

I think a stronger sense akin (if not a direct reference) to the connotations associated with the immensely powerful pull that addiction commands is appropriate to the context of Nietzsche's concern.

Earlier in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche links independence, when attempted by those who are unprepared for it, with the story of Theseus and the minotaur, a theme that is echoed at the end of the book.⁸ In *BGE* 29, Nietzsche writes:

Independence is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong. And whoever attempts it even with the best right but without inner constraint proves that it is probably not only strong, but also daring to the point of recklessness. He enters a labyrinth, he multiplies a thousandfold the dangers which life brings with it in any case, not the least of which is that no one can see how and where he loses his way, becomes lonely, and is torn piecemeal by some minotaur of conscience. Supposing one like that comes to grief, this happens so far from the comprehension of men that they neither feel it nor sympathize. And he cannot go back any longer. Nor can he go back to the pity of men. –

The German in this case is 'Unabhängig zu sein', to be unattached. And this passage is also related to the earlier concern about solitude, only here Nietzsche underscores just how difficult it can be to tolerate such detachment. Clearly, he has in mind something more extreme than simply non-reliance or lack of cooperation in using this term. This condition is dissociative but it is dissociative from a state of reliance or addiction on substances that themselves induce states of dissociation. Furthermore, insofar as the root *abhäng* means hang below, *unabhäng* could playfully suggest a certain sort of defiance of gravity. This is an image invoked by Nietzsche in his emphasis on dancing as well as flying like a bird as in 'The Songs of Prince

⁸Some notable discussions of Ariadne include Gilles Deleuze, 'The Mystery of Ariadne according to Nietzsche,' in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Gary Shapiro, *Nietzschean Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Vogelfrei', the appendix to *GS*, and it is at the core of Nietzsche's therapy for combatting what he calls 'the spirit of gravity' in *GS* (especially sections 380 and 382) and *Z*, as mentioned below.⁹ All told, independence, for Nietzsche, appears to be much more complex and potentially more significant than it might appear at first glance.

Nietzsche provides greater focus and specificity about his intended meaning when he returns to some related ideas later in the final section of 'The Free Spirit' in *BGE*. In this case, Nietzsche associates free, *very free* spirits with the philosophers of the future. That is, it would appear that the philosophers of the future are free spirits, but not all free spirits are philosophers of the future. In this section, Nietzsche directly states that he wants to be as clear as possible about the nature of the free spirits so as to avoid misunderstanding and confusion of them with other varieties of free spirit advocated by those *Freidenker* and the like, mentioned above, those whom Nietzsche describes as '*levelers*'; they are:

all human beings without solitude [*Einsamkeit*], without their own solitude [*eigne Einsamkeit*], clumsy good fellows whom one should not deny either courage or respectable decency – only they are unfree [*unfrei*] and ridiculously superficial [*zum Lachen oberflächlich sind*], above all in their basic inclination to find in the forms of the old society as it has existed so far just about the cause of *all* human misery and failure – which is a way of standing truth happily upon her head! What they would like to strive for with all their powers is the universal green-pasture happiness of the herd, with security, lack of danger, comfort, and an easier life for everyone; the two songs and doctrines which they repeat most often are 'equality of rights' and 'sympathy for all that suffers' – and suffering itself they take for something that must be *abolished*. (*BGE* 44)

By contrast, those whom Nietzsche sees as truly *free* regard that which opposes the goals of the *Freidenker*, the opposite conditions of security, safety, comfort, and ease, as conditions for growth, even flourishing: 'prolonged

⁹I am grateful to Duncan Large for pointing out this connection.

pressure and constraint' facilitate growth, development, and the gathering of strength and vigor. Famously – and *infamously* – Nietzsche claims certain forms of *unfreedom* condition the opposite spirit: 'We think that hardness, forcefulness, slavery, danger in the alley and the heart, life in hiding, stoicism, the art of experiment and devilry of every kind, that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents serves the enhancement of the species 'man' as much as its opposite does' (*BGE* 44). I will suggest below how we can see this as potentially contributing to the positive sense of freedom Nietzsche's free spirits realize and how this is related to what the free spirits are ultimately, *possibly*, able to do, but before I get to that point, I wish to take notice of a few things. Nietzsche is **not** saying that 'hardness, forcefulness, slavery', and the like are *more* life-enhancing than their opposite – rather, he claims they are enhancing *at least as much* as their opposites. This is to some extent an acknowledgement and justification (in the sense of recognition of what Nietzsche elsewhere affirms as the *innocence of becoming*) of the fullness of life, an affirmation or love of all that is, rather than just the particular aspects we especially esteem or to which we aspire at any particular moment. This, I suggest later on in the article, is an important affective orientation for the free spirit to take. It will play an important role in making it possible for Nietzsche's free spirits' detachment to not ultimately undermine them.¹⁰

Returning to the matter of how unfreedom, more specifically, might be necessary for or potentially in the service of freedom, we should certainly try to gain greater clarity about the matter of *whose unfreedom* serves freedom and in what respect. One possible interpretation, one not unfamiliar in the critical literature on Nietzsche and not without justification, is that Nietzsche might mean that it is necessary for *some* to be unfree in order for *others* to be free. In such a case, the unfree are sacrificed for the benefit or advantage of the freedom of those (presumably few) others who will reap the greatest benefits of the forced labor and limited opportunities of those

¹⁰For a different, but interesting, account of the significance of the affective orientation toward truth in Nietzsche with respect to its bearing on freedom, see Peter Poellner, 'Nietzschean Freedom,' in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, ed. Ken Gemes and Simon May (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 151–181.

who are enslaved. Others are simply the means to serve the end of the production of rare type who achieves unprecedented freedom. There are a good number of other passages where Nietzsche makes reference to conditions of servitude and subjection of this sort, suggesting precisely such an interpretation (as for example just a few sections later in the book where philosophers are described as exercising a 'selective and cultivating influence' placing others 'under their spell' (*BGE* 61), so I am not categorically denying that it is part of the story of Nietzsche's complicated views on freedom. But it is also the case that part of what Nietzsche seems to think is that *unfreedom conditions a certain kind of freedom* in the very same individuals – it is somehow important that those who would be free, perhaps especially those who would be very free, must somehow first (or perhaps in some respects simultaneously) be unfree, that, minimally, as suggested in *BGE* 29, cited above, they have an *inner constraint*. To round off this part of my discussion, I wish to focus on precisely this relation between freedom and unfreedom, which will bring us back to further exploration of what constitutes *Abhängigkeit*, dependence, of the sort from which the free spirits are free. *BGE* 41 continues and concludes with the following:

Not to remain stuck to a person – not even the most loved – every person is a prison, also a nook. Not to remain stuck to a fatherland – not even when it suffers most and needs help most – it is less difficult to sever one's heart from a victorious fatherland. Not to remain stuck to some pity – not even for higher men into whose rare torture and helplessness some accident allowed us to look. Not to remain stuck to a science – even if it should lure us with the most precious finds that seem to have been saved up precisely for us. Not to remain stuck to one's own detachment, to that voluptuous remoteness and strangeness of the bird who flees ever higher to see ever more below him – the danger of the flier. Not to remain stuck to our own virtues and become as a whole the victim of some detail in us, such as our hospitality, which is the danger of dangers for superior and rich souls who spend themselves lavishly, almost indifferently, and exaggerate the virtue of gen-

erosity into a vice. One must know how *to conserve oneself*: the hardest test of independence.

Here, dependence is defined not merely in terms of consorting with others and so on but rather in terms of ‘remaining stuck’, becoming *dependent*: Not to remain stuck to a person – not even the most loved; ‘Not to remain stuck to a fatherland’. Nietzsche does not say, ‘Don’t love, don’t bother thinking about or becoming involved with a fatherland’. Instead, he says that one who is independent in the way that free spirits are described just a few sections further on in *BGE* 44, avoids the lures of dependence.

Is it any wonder that we ‘free spirits’ are not exactly the most communicative spirits? that we do not want to betray in every particular *from what* a spirit can liberate himself and *to what* he may then be driven? And as for the meaning of the dangerous formula ‘beyond good and evil’, with which we at least guard against being mistaken for others: we *are* something different from ‘*libres-penseurs*’, ‘*liberi pensatori*’, ‘*Freidenker*’, and whatever else all these goodly advocates of ‘modern ideas’ like to call themselves.

At home, or at least having been guests, in many countries of the spirit; having escaped again and again from the musty agreeable nooks into which preference and prejudice, youth, origin, the accidents of people and books or even exhaustion from wandering seemed to have banished us; full of malice against the lures of dependence that lie hidden in honors, or money, or offices, or enthusiasms of the senses;

Free of those sorts of attachments one can then cultivate attachments for other things to the point of gratitude:

grateful even to need and vacillating sickness because they always rid us from some rule and its ‘prejudice’, grateful to god, devil, sheep, and worm in us;

Detached from the lures and preoccupations described above, one can form interests in other things, explore them:

curious to a vice, investigators to the point of cruelty, with uninhibited fingers for the unfathomable, with teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible, ready for every feat that requires a sense of acuteness and acute senses, ready for every venture...

Free spirits are not merely free of any sort of attachment; rather, they avoid remaining stuck to such bonds – even as we have seen, *to their notion of themselves as being detached*. And this condition makes it possible for them to form other attachments, so that they are enabled to expand their range of possible associations rather than limit it. Moreover, because of the way in which they hold their attachments, in contrast with the fettered spirits who are addicted to their attachments, the free spirits, at least as described here appear to be able to *love* in ways that a more narrow partiality might not allow. If this is a reasonable and appropriate interpretation of Nietzsche's passage here, then this provides opportunities to appreciate a distinctively affirmative dimension of Nietzsche's sense of independence and how it potentially impacts our relations with others.

Frequently in Nietzsche's texts, free spirits are described in terms of being great travelers: they associate with many different and *many different kinds of* people. This appears to be one of the ways in which they negatively avoid remaining stuck, but I think this same characteristic also positively contributes to who and what they are and what they are able to do. In these very same associations, part of what the free spirit is able to do by loosening himself from just one or several chains, is to form many more associations, develop more and more of his own resources. In being free from the limitations of the fettered spirit, free spirits are *free to become something more*. But, obviously, it is not sheer multiplicity that Nietzsche admires. Rather, he appears to think of this capacity in terms of a kind of fullness and amplitude, a bounty. I shall have more to say about this in just a moment. But before doing so, I note that one of the ways in which the free spirit *cannot* be free – because no one can be – is in the sense of having a free will, realizing the classic notion of free will.

Of course, there is no single 'classic notion of free will', rather there are classical notions of free will, virtually all of which Nietzsche appears to

reject. Nietzsche repeatedly and consistently rails against this view, offering as an alternative a drive psychology that explains the *experience* and *feeling of willing* as a particular perspective of a drive or set of drives in relation to the others, that is, the perspective of the commanding drive or drives that constitute us. Part of the reason why free will in this sense is not possible, Nietzsche thinks, is because he does not think there is any such thing as a will that somehow is in a relationship with other parts of the soul such that it can command. There is no separate ego or *I* behind our actions willing or directing in the background. We are organizations of drives, and there are a varieties of ways in which such organizations take shape and are maintained.¹¹

Free spirits, by virtue of the extraordinary associations that their independence facilitates, have a greater, more expansive set of resources enlivened, activated, and ready for recruitment in the organizations they are. If this is right then we can also consider the various ways in which organizations such as those the free spirits are enabled to become can be said to be free (or not). This focuses the question of the freedom of the free spirit on the relationship of its own constitutive parts or features rather than strictly on its freedom with respect to other organizations, or its political or social situation.

3. CHALLENGING FREEDOM: THE DIFFICULTY OF FREEDOM FOR THE FREE SPIRITS

Nietzsche creates something of a problem in explaining how the loosening of attachment and the amplification of available drives can lead to strength rather than disintegration and chaos. This seems to be precisely the kind of risk Nietzsche conjures in association of independence with the minotaur in the passage cited above. And it raises the question of how free spirits capitalize on the variety they acquire through their increased associations

¹¹I elaborate these ideas in various publications, most recently my Christa Davis Acampora, 'Beholding Nietzsche: *Ecce Homo*, Fate, and Freedom,' chap. 16 in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. Ken Gemes and Simon May (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

so that they can be said to be *enabled* by these resources rather than ruined by them.

One of the dangers associated with enlivening more of the drives and expanding their capacities by virtue of amplifying or increasing one's associations is that it may result in a situation more likely to produce conflict. Homogenization of drives can be seen as in the service of a kind of relative peace, or at least the appearance of such through minimizing conflict. The fettered soul has a dominant drive that whips into submission all the others: The drive for unconditional truth is a drive that maintains its rule in the fettered spirit by subjugating the other drives. Thus, it must always guard against losing its dominance. It is hard to describe such a person as actually free even if they have the semblance of ruling themselves. They might have order but there is very much in them that would seem to be unfree.

The free spirit, on the other hand, becomes an expansive multiplicity of drives,¹² and this potentially creates and nourishes more contenders for dominance in the soul. The free spirit, perhaps more than any type among Nietzsche's figures, faces certain risks, including a lack of order that would diminish rather than strengthen it. The challenge of the free spirit is to actively recruit the drives and their cooperation so that it can be free in another respect, namely *free from* certain kinds of disabling conflicts among the drives as well as *freely enabled* and fit to realize the kind of activity described above. Although he clearly articulates the need for unity in the form of 'giving style to one's character' (*GS* 290) and even suggests how one might 'combat the intensity of drives' (*D* 109), I am not sure that Nietzsche provides us with a robust account of how such unification might come about, or how it might work out the way he envisions for those who are not only free but also – perhaps stylishly – strong.

Nietzsche himself at times appears to wonder how this is possible. In a passage titled 'The wanderer speaks', which refers to a figure featured in the title to one of the parts of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche writes:

That one *wants* to go precisely out there, up there, may be

¹²Nietzsche expresses admiration for this type, not necessarily linked with free spirits, in *BGE* 212, *GS* 290, *TI* IX 49. See discussion by Poellner, 'Nietzschean Freedom,' p. 153ff.

a minor madness, a peculiar and unreasonable ‘you must’ – for we seekers for knowledge also have our idiosyncrasies of ‘unfree will’ – the question is whether one really *can* get up there. This may depend on manifold conditions. In the main the question is how light or heavy we are – the problem of our ‘specific gravity.’ One must have liberated oneself [*Man muss sich von Vielem losgebunden haben*] from many things that oppress, inhibit, hold down, and make heavy precisely us Europeans today.

Whether or not it is possible to achieve the kind of loosening of attachment, the *levity* that would be required to achieve the perspective he anticipates, is surely not guaranteed, and there are certain cultural conditions and inheritances that would seem to be opposed to this, that would make at least modern Europeans more susceptible to the forces of (psychic) gravity, so to speak. About this, Nietzsche continues:

The human being of such a beyond who wants to behold the supreme measures of value of his time must first of all ‘overcome’ this time in himself – this is the test of his strength – and consequently not only his time but also his prior aversion and contradiction *against* this time, his suffering from this time, his untimeliness, his *romanticism*.

In this, I think we see ideas similar to the subtle distinctions Nietzsche makes between free spirits to try to measure their freedom by their relation to the conventional views of their own time and thereby distinguish themselves reactively and those who also loosen their attachment to their own opposition, those who hold even the oppositional stance *lightly*.

While accounts of Nietzsche that emphasize the cultivation of the self are attractive¹³ – both in terms of their anticipated shapely products as well as how they tidy up this philosophical problem – I am not fully satisfied with this response to the puzzle of how one might achieve unity

¹³See, for example Keith Ansell Pearson, ‘On Nietzsche’s Moral Therapy in *Dawn*,’ *Continental Philosophy Review* 44, no. 2 (2011): 179–204; Michael Ure, *Nietzsche’s Therapy: Self-cultivation in the Middle Works* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).

from out of the incredible diversity that Nietzsche anticipates as both the problem and the solution to modern existence. Neither am I comfortable with going along with solving the problems another way by elaborating the transcendental conditions of agency and the ‘non-formal, ‘qualitative’ or substantive commitments necessary for freedom’, in large part because I think there is simply insurmountable evidence that Nietzsche does not have a normative ideal for what *we* (rather than *he*) might call ‘full personhood.’¹⁴ There would appear to be no *one* capable of the cultivation, no *one* to be the artist of our lives, certainly no *one* distinct from the organization one already is.

Yet another solution might be sought in the role that education, self-education, and the cultivation of taste might play in shaping, organizing, and coordinating the multifarious drives that we are.¹⁵ And there are certainly passages to be found in Nietzsche’s works that demonstrate he gave serious consideration of such views (e.g., *HH* II P:2; *TI* ‘IX’ 47), and this would seem to be evident in Nietzsche’s own account of himself and how he overcame the influence of Wagner in his life and thought. But, ultimately, I think Nietzsche rather doubted that this was the definite and secure path to achieving psychic well-being. His ambivalence is expressed in *D* 119, in which he begins with the idea that self-knowledge about our constitutive elements or drives and their ‘nutrition’, how they themselves are fed and the ways in which they nourish, is really unknown, and seemingly unknowable:

Experience and make-believe. – No matter how hard a person struggles for self-knowledge, nothing can be more incomplete than the image of all the drives taken together that constitute his being. Scarcely can he call the cruder ones by name: their number and strength, their ebb and flow, their play and counterplay, and, above all, the laws of their *alimentation* [*Ernährung*] remain completely unknown to him.¹⁶

¹⁴See Poellner, ‘Nietzschean Freedom,’ p. 154.

¹⁵See Rebecca Bamford, Duncan Large, and Alexander Nehamas

¹⁶Citation of Nietzsche’s *Dawn* is drawn from Brittain Smith’s translation: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, trans. Brittain Smith, vol. 5, The

The overall nutrition of the entity they constitute, itself appears to be the result of chance rather than deliberate cultivation. Nietzsche continues:

This alimantation thus becomes the work of chance [*Zufalls*]: our daily experiences toss willy-nilly to this drive or that drive some prey or other that it seizes greedily, but the whole coming and going of these events exists completely apart from any meaningful connection to the alimentary needs of the sum drives: so that the result will always be twofold: the starving and stunting of some drives and the overstuffing of others. With every moment of our lives some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others dry up, depending on the nourishment that the moment does or does not supply.¹⁷

Associations, indeed, shape us, affect the intensity of drives and their relations to others (recall *HH* II P:5). But any choosing of associations will be done by and in accordance with the preferences of the drives that happen to be on top. In short, while human growth, change, and development are surely possible, planning it (much less *orchestrating* it) appears to be difficult if not impossible. It would seem there can be no micromanaging one's soul in this way because all 'management' of this kind will always and only be the work of whatever drive or set of drives happen to be dominant from the start.

In understanding Nietzsche's conception of the independence of the free spirit, discussed above, I think we have some suggestions for how this *might* be possible. I underscore *might* because whatever may be the case, it is certainly true that there are no guarantees here, no recipes or blueprints to follow in becoming what one is. But loosening the self for attachments, cultivating the variety of resources available would seem to make it at least *possible* that a different political or social structure for the soul might be in

Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche (1881; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), I have also consulted Hollingdale's translation.

¹⁷Illuminating discussion of this image of the polyp as it relates to Nietzsche's drive psychology can be found in Brian Domino, 'Polyp Man,' in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 42–49.

the offering. This much is suggested in the added preface to *HH* II P:5,¹⁸ where Nietzsche writes:

Just as a physician places his patient in a wholly strange environment so that he may be removed from his entire ‘hitherto’, from his cares, friends, letters, duties, stupidities and torments of memory and learn to reach out his hands and senses to new nourishment, a new sun, a new future, so I, as physician and patient in one, compelled myself to an opposite and unexplored *clime of the soul*, and especially to a curative journey into strange parts, into *strangeness* itself, to an inquisitiveness regarding every kind of strange thing... A protracted wandering around, seeking, changing followed from this, a repugnance towards all staying still, towards every blunt affirmation and denial; likewise a dietetic and discipline designed to make it as easy as possible for the spirit to run long distances, to fly to great heights, above all again and again to fly away. A *minimum* of life, in fact, and unchaining from all coarser desires, an independence in the midst of all kinds of unfavorable outward circumstances together with pride in being *able* to live surrounded by these unfavorable circumstances; a certain amount of cynicism, perhaps, a certain amount of ‘barrel’, but just as surely a great deal of capricious happiness, capricious cheerfulness, a great deal of stillness, light, subtler folly, concealed enthusiasm – all this finally resulted in a great spiritual strengthening, an increasing joy and abundance of health.

But, of course, the outcome here is uncertain and there are many possibilities that emerge, including tyranny, chaos, and perhaps virtually everything in between.¹⁹ Such risk might be inevitable and unavoidable; it might be what is required, what must be tolerated in, perhaps even loved about,

¹⁸Citations of *HH* are drawn from Hollingdale’s translation (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁹If we take the free spirit not as an individual but rather more like the spirit of an age or a spiritual capacity that might be realized by or characteristic of groups, peoples, then we might make more headway on thinking about how such organizations and reorganizations

the kind of experimentalism that the free spirits are supposed to exercise, the dancing they are supposed to engage. (And not only dancing but also ‘steigen, klettern, fliegen’ [rising, climbing, flying], all of which aim to overcome or not be subject to the pull of gravity, to hang below [*abhäng*].) Experiments can be planned to greater and lesser degrees, and they are virtually always guided by what it is that we already know and already value, or at least they are not wholly independent of such. Moreover, it is possible to lose ourselves within them.²⁰ I’m uncertain how one plans to manage the inherent riskiness of this responsibly. But such risk might nevertheless be *necessary*, and the resultant splendor that such risk-taking potentially yields might be better described as product of chance rather than deliberate calculation or determined cultivation. If this is so, then we might say that the free spirit is free in yet one more sense – cosmically free, a piece of fate and chance, care-free, and a ‘free throw’ of the dice.²¹

might work by looking at how Nietzsche thinks about the current independence of Europe, its resultant disintegration and its simultaneous desire to become one. Being ‘a good European’ might be one way of realizing free spirituality in such a case.

²⁰But experimentalism is not necessarily inherently good. See *GS* 356, where Nietzsche writes about contemporary Europeans who are increasingly becoming like superficial actors (rather than real human beings): ‘The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and can manage almost any role, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art.’ Translation by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

²¹See *GS* 277.

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