

## NIETZSCHE ON MONISM ABOUT OBJECTS

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**ABSTRACT:** This article concerns whether Nietzsche is sympathetic to *monism* about concrete objects, the heterodox metaphysical view that there is exactly one concrete object. I first dispel prominent reasons for thinking that Nietzsche rejects monism. I then develop the most compelling arguments for monism in Nietzsche's writings and check for soundness. The arguments seem to be supported by the texts, but they have not been developed in the literature. Despite such arguments, I suggest that Nietzsche is actually not sympathetic to monism about objects—but his reasons for siding against monism are not at all obvious. The result should be a new understanding of some of Nietzsche's fundamental ontological commitments.

Nietzsche's view of concrete objects is difficult to pin down, and commentators have offered widely different accounts.<sup>1</sup> This paper concerns whether Nietzsche is sympathetic to *monism* about concrete objects. Of course, there are many varieties of monism. They share in attributing *oneness* to something. Nietzsche appears to embrace oneness in some important sense when he notes, "Thinking is an action which takes apart what is really one" (KSA 11:40[38]). But what exactly is *one*? Many readers argue that Nietzsche is committed to *substance* monism, the view that all concrete objects fall under

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<sup>1</sup> For the reading that Nietzsche thinks objects are socially constructed, see Nehamas 1985; Anderson 1998; Cox 1999; Remhof 2015. For the reading that objects have intrinsic natures, see Hales and Welshon 2000; Doyle 2009. For a commonsense realist reading, see Clark 1990; Leiter 1994. For the reading that objects do not exist, see Nola 1987; Meyer 2014, 218–219.

one particular *type* or *kind*, specifically “will to power.”<sup>2</sup> Generally, this view holds that all objects are of the type *force*, such that all objects are bundles of forces. Whether Nietzsche embraces this position, and what the position amounts to, has been debated for decades. My interest largely lies elsewhere.

I want to examine whether Nietzsche is sympathetic to *object* monism, the heterodox metaphysical view that there is exactly one concrete object. Object monism can be differentiated into existence monism and priority monism. Existence monism holds that exactly one concrete object exists: the world. On this view, the world is an object with enormous structural complexity and variability, but with no genuine parts. As a result, there are no other objects but the world. Alternatively, priority monism holds that exactly one basic concrete object exists, and other objects, if they exist, are derivative parts of the one basic object. On this view, objects such as trees, chairs, and planets, if they exist, are parts of the world as a whole.

Historically, existence monism has been associated with Parmenides, Melissus, and Spinoza, and priority monism has been linked to, among others, Plato, Spinoza, Hegel, and Royce. But neither monist view has been attributed to Nietzsche. In fact, it does not even *occur* to most commentators that Nietzsche could be an object monist.<sup>3</sup> However, two prominent thinkers have recently associated Nietzsche with such a position. John Richardson says that on Nietzsche’s account there is reason to think “only one entity” exists (2015, 90), and Galen Strawson says that there is some evidence to suppose that Nietzsche believes that “reality is one” (2015, 10) in the sense that Nietzsche might be a “thing-monist” (13). Unfortunately, neither commentator explores Nietzsche’s relation to object monism in detail—both drop the issue and move on to other things. But I want to know whether there are good reasons for thinking that Nietzsche embraces monism about objects.

And there do seem to be. After Nietzsche claims that “Thinking is an action which takes apart what is really one,” for example, he remarks, “Nothing is ever ‘added’ in reality, nor is anything ever ‘divided’; two

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Danto 1965, 216–218; Schacht 1983, ch. 4; Deleuze 1983, 86; Schrift 1995, 42; Poellner 1995, 240; Richardson 1996; Hales and Welshon 1999, 348; Doyle 2009; Strawson 2015, 10–11. Hussain (2004) holds that Nietzsche adopts Mach’s neutral monism, which is a substance monist position that does not hold that all objects are of the type will to power. Schopenhauer, perhaps Nietzsche’s most significant influence, is clearly committed to substance monism—all objects are of the type *will*.

<sup>3</sup> For example, prominent works on Nietzsche’s metaphysics, such as Schacht 1983; Richardson 1996; Poellner 1996; Cox 1999; Hales and Welshon 2000; and Doyle 2009, never investigate Nietzsche’s relation to object monism.

halves of a thing are not the same as a whole” (KSA 11:40[38]).<sup>4</sup> Notice that substance monism cannot make sense of this passage. Nietzsche is not saying that no types or kinds of objects can be added or divided from the whole. He is instead suggesting that nothing can be added or divided from some one thing which constitutes the whole of reality. Existence or priority monism might very well make good sense of this view.

The primary aim of this paper is to develop the most compelling arguments for object monism in Nietzsche’s writings and check for soundness. In section 1, I address prominent reasons for thinking that Nietzsche rejects monism. I suggest that those reasons, in fact, do not stand in the way of reading as an object monist. Sections 2 and 3 reconstruct arguments for thinking that Nietzsche embraces existence monism and priority monism, respectively. Each argument seems to be supported by the texts, but neither have been developed in the literature. Despite such arguments, I suggest that Nietzsche is actually *not* sympathetic to existence or priority monism—but his reasons for siding against monism are not at all straightforward. This paper therefore highlights an ontological alternative that, for the most part, lies buried in Nietzsche’s work and has not been discussed, and brings that alternative into the light of day for critical analysis. The result should be a new understanding of some of Nietzsche’s fundamental ontological commitments.

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<sup>4</sup> This translation is in part due to Hill via personal correspondence. My thanks to him for the help. To be sure that this notebook passage at least appears to present evidence that Nietzsche might be sympathetic to object monism, let me quote the notebook entry in full in and offer a more detailed reading. Here is the passage:

It is important to characterize correctly the unity in which thinking, feeling, and all affects are summarized: obviously the intellect is only a tool, but in whose hands? Certainly, the affects. And these are a multiplicity, behind which it is not necessary to establish a unity: it suffices to regard it as a regency. That the organs have developed everywhere, as morphological development shows, may certainly be used as an analogy for the spiritual: so that something “new” can always only be grasped by the exertion of a single force from a synthetic force.

Thinking is an action which takes apart what is really one. Everywhere there is the appearance that there are countable varieties, even in thought. Nothing is ever “added” in reality, nor is anything ever “divided”; two halves of a thing are not the same as a whole (KSA 11:40[38]).

The passage begins by discussing the correct description of the unity of thinking, willing, and feeling. Nietzsche holds that thought is a tool of the affects, that there are multiple affects, and that there is no need to impose a unity on that multiplicity. In the second part of the passage, Nietzsche claims that thought renders multiple what really exists as a unity, and this process supplies the appearance of multiplicity. Here is how this passage seems to support object monism, particularly existence monism. Existence monism holds that the world contains multiplicity, but also that such multiplicity does not imply that the world has proper parts, despite appearances to the contrary. This seems to support Nietzsche’s claim that multiplicity exists—for example, the “affects” are “a multiplicity”—but in fact “reality” is “really one.” Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to be clear about these interpretive issues.

Before beginning, I want to say up front that much of this paper utilizes material from Nietzsche's notebooks. The notes are where Nietzsche's most noticeable statements concerning monism arise, which makes sense given that the notebooks contain some of his most interesting thoughts on metaphysics. Indeed, it is more or less standard for works that focus on Nietzsche's metaphysics to focus on the notebooks. I follow this practice. Opening the notebooks suits the project at hand. I should add that in a letter to Franz Overbeck dated July 2, 1885, Nietzsche writes, "I often feel ashamed that I have said so much in public already, that should have never been put in front on an 'audience,' even in more worthy and deeper times." This suggests that there might be reason to think that Nietzsche kept some of his preferred positions unpublished. Some of those positions could very well involve his best metaphysical insights, and I think they deserve our attention.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. HOW COULD NIETZSCHE BE AN OBJECT MONIST?

There are two immediate objections to reading Nietzsche as an object monist. These objections might explain why commentators typically ignore the idea that Nietzsche could endorse monism. The first objection is that Nietzsche appears to claim that monist views are essentially associated with nihilism. Consider the following:

Nihilism as a psychological condition arises when man imagines that there is a wholeness, a system, even an organization to all that occurs, so that the mind, longing for something to admire and worship, revels in the general idea of a supreme form of governance and administration (if it is the mind of a logician, perfect consistency and objective dialectic will suffice to reconcile it to everything). When man believes in a kind of unity, in some form of 'monism,' he feels a profound sense of relation to and dependence upon a whole that is infinitely superior to him, and feels himself to be a mode of the divine. 'The greater good demands the surrender of the individual . . .' but lo and behold, there is no greater good! In essence, man loses all belief in his own worth if there is no whole of infinite worth encompassing him, no power working through him; or, to put it differently, he conceived of such a whole in order to prop up his own sense of self-worth. (KSA 13:11[99])

Nietzsche points out that human beings often take themselves to be valuable because they believe that the world exhibits some sort of unity that supports such value.<sup>6</sup> Spinoza, for example, holds that we find value when

<sup>5</sup> For approaches to Nietzsche's philosophy that typically steer clear of the notebooks, see Clark 1990; Leiter 2002.

<sup>6</sup> For the view that Nietzsche's attack on monism here can be levelled against Schelling, see Emden 2014, 159.

we come to know that all events necessarily follow from the essence of matter and thought in accordance with universal laws determined by God. Value comes from contemplating the whole with reverent, intellectual equanimity. Nietzsche believes that no such whole exists: “there is no overarching unity in the diversity of events” (KSA 13:11[99]). The world fails to exhibit the kind of unity that would support the manifestation of values those like Spinoza seek. The nihilistic view that human beings cannot find themselves valuable follows.

To determine whether this argument challenges object monism we need to understand what kind of unity Nietzsche denies exists and why. The answer is that Nietzsche rejects unity posited to support axiological positions that, for some reason or another, he finds problematic, such as Spinoza’s position that intellectual equanimity constitutes a life of value. Nietzsche’s criticism of unity therefore turns on what ethical positions unity supports. Consequently, it would be a mistake to think that Nietzsche rejects monism as nihilistic *tout court*. There is room for him to embrace a positive view of monism.

Additionally, Nietzsche claims that the kind of monism philosophers like Spinoza offer us is nihilistic because the “whole world” is “becoming” (KSA 13:11[99]). “Underneath all becoming,” he says, “there is no great unity by virtue of which the individual might become a part of a larger whole, as if he were completely immersing himself in an element of supreme value” (KSA 13:11[99]). The claim that the world as a whole is “becoming” certainly seems to support some version of monism, though it is unclear whether this includes object monism. The important point is that Nietzsche not only appears to differentiate nihilistic from non-nihilistic forms of monism, but even embraces the latter. Indeed, readers familiar with Nietzsche’s texts know he boldly proclaims that the world as a whole is “becoming,” “chaos,” or “will to power,” all of which are meant to avoid nihilism in some manner. He says the “whole world” is “becoming” (KSA 13:11[99]); “The total character of the world . . . is for all eternity *chaos*” (GS 109); and “*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!*” (KSA 11:38[12], cf. BGE 36). I want to know whether such statements support monism about concrete objects.

This brings us to the second objection. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1872), an unpublished but important early work, Nietzsche rejects Parmenidean “being,” more specifically the monist view that “there is only unity” (PT 10), and praises Heraclitus’s non-Parmenidean view that the world is “*becoming*” (PT 9). Parmenides is even said to be the “counter-image” of Heraclitus (PT 9). Since Nietzsche’s rejection of Parmenides and

endorsement of Heraclitus remains unwavering in future writings, it seems strange to think that Nietzsche would endorse a monism of “becoming.”

What, exactly, is Nietzsche’s criticism of Parmenidean monism? Nietzsche holds the naturalist position that sense experience is an essential criterion of truth (see BGE 134), and, following Heraclitus, he believes that sense experience reveals that the world undergoes wholesale change (see TI “Reason” 2). On Nietzsche’s reading, Parmenides offers a monist view incompatible with such change, and therefore denies the significance of sensory information: “All sense perceptions, says Parmenides, yield but illusions” (PT 10). Parmenidean monism fails because it does not account for naturalist constraints on inquiry. Nietzsche therefore writes, “When one makes as total a judgment as does Parmenides about the whole of the world, one ceases to be a scientist” (PT 10). This criticism of Parmenides can be turned into an objection regarding Nietzsche’s monist sympathies. When Nietzsche claims that the world as a whole is “becoming,” “chaos,” or “will to power,” it could be argued that he violates naturalist constraints on inquiry. After all, such proclamations appear to be wild metaphysical pronouncements outside the possibility of empirical verification. Perhaps commitment to object monism is one such pronouncement.

But maybe not. If the arguments for reading Nietzsche as a monist rely on premises that require no empirical verification for their plausibility, and no better arguments can be found, then Nietzsche will fall to the criticism. My view is that he escapes the objection. To see why, we must turn to those arguments.

## 2. NIETZSCHE AND EXISTENCE MONISM

The first object monist position to consider is existence monism.<sup>7</sup> This view holds that the world is the only concrete object in existence. Although there are no proper parts to the world, though, the world does contain various structures and spatiotemporal regions. To formalize existence monism, let ‘C’ be the property of being a concrete object. Then we have:  $\exists x(Cx \ \& \ \forall y[Cy \ \rightarrow \ x=y])$ . Existence monism contrasts with existence *pluralism*, the view that at least two distinct concrete objects exist. Existence pluralism looks like this:  $\exists x\exists y(Cx \ \& \ Cy \ \& \ x \neq y)$ . Before looking at an argument for existence monism, we should add a quick word about truth. Existence monists hold that truth claims only directly apply to the world as a whole. But existence monists need not throw out the truth predicate for everyday discourse. For example, they might believe that claims about various structures and spatiotemporal regions of the world can be approximately true.

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<sup>7</sup> The formulations of existence monism and priority monism, which begin sections 2 and 3 of the paper, respectively, are indebted to Schaffer 2016.

And, importantly, Nietzsche appears to adopt an approximate notion of truth that could be leveled to support this position (see BGE 34). But I will pass over this issue because we are targeting bigger fish.<sup>8</sup> Does Nietzsche really believe that the world is the only concrete object in existence?

Nietzsche might very well endorse what is perhaps the best argument for existence monism. The argument holds that we can provide a complete account of worldly phenomena by positing only the existence of the world—no further objects are needed. Here is the argument<sup>9</sup>:

EM1. The world is the only concrete object needed to explain how the world causally develops.

EM2. If so, then: if there were proper parts of the world, they would be explanatorily redundant entities.

EM3. There are no explanatorily redundant entities.

EM4. So, the world has no proper parts.

The first premise—the truth or falsity of which is certainly empirically verifiable—holds that the world’s concrete nature can provide a complete causal explanation of worldly events, assuming that we can supply the principles that govern the world’s development. This explanation does not require reference to any proper parts of the world, such as cats and dogs, tables and chairs, or planets and moons. For example, consider a Newtonian world containing what we would typically describe as a soccer ball bouncing off a goalpost. All that is needed to explain this event is the world’s occupational state relative to Newtonian configuration space and principles such as  $F=ma$ . Such principles only provide information about relations between certain properties in space over time. They say nothing about which concrete objects exist. As a result, the soccer ball and the goalpost are not required to explain the event. The world alone supplies sufficient causal information.

Does Nietzsche endorse EM1? He does note that “All events, all motion, [and] all becoming” are “a determination of degrees and relations of force” (KSA 12:9[91], cf. GM II:12). Events, motion, and becoming should be understood as causal phenomena. Nietzsche suggests that such phenomena can be explained fully in terms of force. This is not Newtonian force, however, but force he calls “will to power.” Newton construes force in terms of fundamental material substance. Nietzsche famously follows Boscovich in conceiving force to be physical and fundamental, such that material

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<sup>8</sup> For a treatment of Nietzsche’s approximate view of truth, see Remhof 2016. For a treatment of how a contemporary version of existence monism treats truth, see Horgan and Potrč 2000.

<sup>9</sup> I adopt this from Schaffer 2016.

properties emerge from relations between forces.<sup>10</sup> For Nietzsche, material properties emerge from bundles of heterogeneous forces, or what he calls a “complex of events” (KSA 12:9[91]). On Nietzsche’s view, a causal event conceived as will to power can be modeled as this:  $\langle \alpha \rightarrow \epsilon \rightarrow \beta \rangle$ , where  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are bundles of forces and  $\epsilon$  is a directed energy transfer between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ .<sup>11</sup> Causal events consist in force transferring from one bundle to another. No concrete entities like tables or chairs require mention. Provided that “all events, all motion, [and] all becoming” are “a determination of degrees and relations of force,” then, it seems that all worldly phenomena can be explained with this basic principle.

Does Nietzsche think the world is the only object needed to explain the world’s causal development? Perhaps yes, despite the fact that he never explicitly says so. Here is my reconstruction of his argument. According to Nietzsche, bundles of forces are wholly relational. Specifically, their contextual relations with all other bundles constitute their nature. He notes, “[a bundle’s] essence lies in [its] relation to all other [bundles]” (KSA 13:14[79], cf. 13:14[153], 13:14[154]). The nature of every bundle depends on, and is depended on by, the nature of every other bundle. Call this position Contextual Constitution.<sup>12</sup> On this view, no entities in the world have an independently determinate nature. Only the world as a whole has such a nature.<sup>13</sup> And Nietzsche identifies reality with the whole: “*Reality* consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual toward the whole” (KSA 13:14[184], cf. PT 5).<sup>14</sup> Altogether, Nietzsche appears to believe that the world is a determinately structured whole that can be fully explained vis-à-vis causal relations between bundles of forces in accordance with a particular principle concerning force. Bundles supply vast structural variability and complexity, but independent bundles are not needed to explain worldly phenomena—all that is needed is the determinately structured whole. This provides good reason to think that Nietzsche endorses EM1, the claim that the world as a whole is the only object needed to explain how the world causally develops.

EM2 holds that if the world is the only concrete object needed to explain how the world causally develops, then: if there were proper parts of the world, they would be explanatorily redundant entities. This premise should be uncontroversial. If the world provides a sufficient explanation for the causal development of all worldly phenomena, as Nietzsche appears to

<sup>10</sup> See Boscovich 1922.

<sup>11</sup> I adopt this from Welshon 2004, 174.

<sup>12</sup> See Remhof 2015, 300.

<sup>13</sup> Richardson (2015, 90) points this out as well.

<sup>14</sup> “Individual” should not be understood as a proper part, of course, but rather some organization of bundle of forces or another.

think, then the proper parts of the world could only function to explain what has already been explained. In this sense, the parts would be explanatorily redundant.

EM3, the final premise, claims that there are no explanatorily redundant entities. This claim is best defended on methodological grounds, particularly Occam's razor. A common reading of Occam's razor holds that explanatorily redundant entities should be discarded. Does Nietzsche endorse such a principle? Clark and Dudrick (2012, 160) have rightly identified an important place in Nietzsche's texts where Occam's razor makes an appearance, and the context even concerns the explanatory power of force. In BGE 12, Nietzsche praises Boscovich for attacking the Newtonian view that hard, extended atoms comprise fundamental reality. Nietzsche proceeds to claim that "we must still go further and declare war," specifically "a ruthless war of the knife" [*einen schonungslosen Krieg auf's Messer*] (BGE 12, my translation), on our need to posit similar atomistic views about the soul. Boscovich holds that material reality can be fully explained in terms of force, which renders Newtonian entities superfluous. Nietzsche's endorsement of Boscovich includes support for Occam's razor.

More support for the principle can be garnered from BGE 36. I will not address whether the passage does or does not support some metaphysical thesis concerning the will to power.<sup>15</sup> I merely want to show that Occam's razor makes an appearance in Nietzsche's proposed line of argument, whatever that argument might be intended to show.

BGE 36 starts with the conjecture, "Suppose nothing else were 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other 'reality' besides the reality of our drives." This suggests a project: "Is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this 'given' would not be *sufficient* to render the so-called mechanistic (and thus material) world comprehensible as well?" (my translation). And, significantly, Nietzsche thinks this experiment is not optional: "not only is it permitted to make the experiment; conscience of *method* demands it." This method, I suggest, involves rejecting explanatorily redundant entities.

Nietzsche continues by saying that if we "recognize the will as *efficient* ... then we have to make the experiment of positing the causality of the will

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<sup>15</sup> For those who deny that in BGE 36 Nietzsche embraces a metaphysical thesis concerning will to power, see Clark 1990; Leiter 2002; Clark and Dudrick 2012. For those who take Nietzsche to embrace a metaphysical thesis concerning the will to power in BGE 36, see Schacht 2000; Welshon 2004.

hypothetically as the only one,” and concludes with a statement about will to power as the *only* efficient causal force:

Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power, as my proposition has it; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will to power . . . then one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as—will to power. The world viewed from inside, defined and determined according to its “intelligible character”—it would be “will to power” and nothing else.

In brief, the passage proposes that if a willed drive event can be understood as an instance of an efficient causal event conceived as will to power, then, after successfully generalizing into other domains, all efficient causal events might be justifiably modeled as will to power. How might this work?<sup>16</sup> The answer turns on structural isomorphism. A willed drive event can be understood as an affective directed transfer of energy from subject to intentional object:  $\langle \text{subject} \rightarrow \text{affect} \rightarrow \text{intentional object} \rangle$ . For example, my love of soccer involves me as subject, love as affect, and soccer as object. We have seen that a will to power event, or a causal event concerning force, has an isomorphic form:  $\langle \alpha \rightarrow \epsilon \rightarrow \beta \rangle$ . The triadic structure of a causal event conceived as will to power is isomorphic to the structure of a willed drive event. If this isomorphism extends to events beyond the domain of psychology, Nietzsche suggests, then eventually we should be permitted to conclude that all efficient causal events are most basically due to the operation of interacting bundles of forces. Hence, Nietzsche offers the will to power as the single explanatory principle for all worldly phenomena.<sup>17</sup> This certainly appears to be a powerful endorsement of Occam’s razor.

In sum, Nietzsche seems to believe that (EM1) the world is the only concrete object needed to explain how the world causally develops; (EM2) if so, then: if there were proper parts of the world, they would be explanatorily redundant entities; and (EM3) there are no explanatorily redundant entities. The existence monist conclusion follows: (EM4) the world has no proper parts. This conclusion might appear counterintuitive, but at the same time the premises do not seem unreasonable.

Nearly all commentators read Nietzsche as an existence pluralist. But how might they respond to the argument? One response is to deny EM2 by claiming that composition is identity. To say composition is identity is to say that there are proper parts of the world, but they are not explanatorily

<sup>16</sup> What follows is indebted to Welshon 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Danto (1965, 216–18) calls this position “Methodological Monism.” Grimm (1977, 169) rightly points out that methodological monism is compatible with there being vast structural complexity to the world.

redundant, since the parts that compose the world and the world itself are identical. Indeed, directly before Nietzsche notes that “*Reality* consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual toward the whole,” he claims that “‘world’ is only a word for the totality of these actions” (KSA 13:14[184]). ‘World’ seems to refer to the totality, and the totality appears to be identical to the actions that compose the totality.

Unfortunately, this notebook passage sits in tension with another passage that suggests composition is *not* identity. Recall, Nietzsche notes that “Nothing is ever ‘added’ in reality, nor is anything ever ‘divided’; two halves of a thing are not the same as a whole” (KSA 11:40[38]). If “two halves of a thing are not the same as a whole,” then by Leibniz’s law the parts and the whole are not identical—they are either structurally distinct, numerically distinct, or both. The current existence pluralist response is therefore lacking. A solid response should contribute to explaining away passages that appear to support monism.

Those who consider Nietzsche to be an existence pluralist might do better by going after EM1, the claim that the world is the only concrete object needed to explain how the world causally develops. One might argue that proper parts are indeed needed to explain the world’s causal development. First, let us take a closer look at Contextual Constitution, the view that bundles of forces are contextually constituted through their relations to other bundles. Importantly, Nietzsche thinks *we* are particular bundles of forces, specifically in the form of drives and affects (see BGE 12). And he gives us a unique power in relation to other bundles: we can organize them into proper objects. He writes, “A thing = its qualities; but these equal everything which *matters* to us about that thing; a unity under which we collect the relations that *may be of some account* to us” (KSA 12:2[77]; cf. GS 58). Following Boscovich, Nietzsche believes the “qualities” or properties we organize into objects are the perceivable effects of microscopic interactions among forces, such that the properties that constitute objects are ultimately constituted by relations among forces. Objects are unities of properties, properties are the perceivable effects of force relations, and unification of such effects occurs through the application of concepts. Thus, Nietzsche says “A ‘thing’ is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept” (KSA 13:14[98]). It is even “enough to create new names,” he asserts, “to create new ‘things’” (GS 58). Our ability to conceptually organize properties implies that we have the power to construct objects.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of this constructivist view of objects in Nietzsche, including arguments against alternative readings and responses to possible objections, see Remhof 2017.

This *constructivist* conception of objects requires a subtler view of Nietzsche's ontological commitments. Contextual Constitution implies both that all bundles of forces are ontologically interdependent and that some bundles are ontologically independent of others. Some bundles are ontologically independent of others because some are genuine objects, constructed through the conceptual organization of properties, and some are not objects—some bundles merely comprise nonunified structures or fill various spatiotemporal regions. There is an ontologically significant difference between proper objects and mere forces. When Nietzsche claims that “*Reality* consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual toward the whole” (KSA 13:14[184]), then, we need to remember that not all actions and reactions are ontologically on a par with others. Some form genuine objects, and some do not.

Additionally, Nietzsche believes that the causal principle concerning force leveled to explain worldly phenomena involves the construction of proper objects. The existence of various worldly structures or spatiotemporal regions will not suffice. Force functions, such as  $\langle \alpha \rightarrow \epsilon \rightarrow \beta \rangle$ , are purely formal. As such, Nietzsche thinks they offer a mere “theory of signs,” by which he means that “reality is nowhere to be found in them” (TI “Reason” 3). Nietzsche believes that we must “*accept* the evidence of the senses” for formulas like force functions to refer to reality (TI “Reason” 3). We embrace sensory evidence by *interpreting* symbols as certain kinds of bundles of forces (e.g., we take  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  to concern planets and moons) and *identifying* individual bundles of forces instantiated by those kinds (e.g., we take  $\alpha$  as Jupiter and  $\beta$  as Europa).<sup>19</sup> Using interpretation and identification, we can begin to offer causal explanations of worldly phenomena using force. And, of course, these explanations require organizing the world into objects, rather than relying on mere relations between properties in space over time. For Nietzsche, logical and mathematical functions are “a means and measure for us to *create* reality” (KSA 12:9[97]),<sup>20</sup> specifically *objects*. Since applying force functions in causal explanations requires the creation of objects, proper parts of the world are needed to explain how the world causally develops. Hence, EM1 is false.

Notice that this existence pluralist reading is perfectly consistent with Nietzsche's remarks concerning monism. Nietzsche claims that “‘world’ is only a word for the totality of [this particular action and reaction of every individual toward the whole]” (KSA 13:14[184]). An existence pluralist

<sup>19</sup> For further discussion of interpretation and identification, see Giere 1998, 74–76; 2006, 62. For further discussion of these notions in Nietzsche, see Remhof 2015, 307–8.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. HH I: 11, 19; GS 111, 121; BGE 4, 21.

hears this: the world itself can be taken as an object provided that we use the concept ‘world’ to unify the totality of properties that emerge from interacting bundles of forces. And the world’s being a constructed object in no way implies that the world is the *only* constructed object.

Nietzsche also says, “Nothing is ever ‘added’ in reality, nor is anything ever ‘divided’; two halves of a thing are not the same as a whole” (KSA 11:40[38]). The first clause suggests that nothing can be added or divided from a single object, namely, the world. But this need not imply existence monism. The best reason for thinking that nothing can be *added* to the world is that the world is a fixed totality of bundles of forces. This is consistent with existence pluralism because, as I have argued, only some bundles are objects. The best reason for thinking that nothing can be *divided* from the world is that forces form an ontologically interdependent whole. This is also consistent with existence pluralism. I argued above that bundles are ontologically interdependent and nonetheless differentiated into objects. Finally, as I have already suggested, Nietzsche’s claim that “two halves of a thing are not the same as a whole” (KSA 11:40[38]) seems warranted because he believes composition is not identity. An object can be identified as some unified group of properties apart from the properties that compose the group. The existence pluralist has no problem with this. The entire passage, then, is easily compatible with existence pluralism.

### 3. NIETZSCHE AND PRIORITY MONISM

I have argued that existence pluralism is better supported by the texts than existence monism. But perhaps Nietzsche embraces a version of concrete object monism that allows for pluralities of objects. One such historically influential view is priority monism. According to priority monism, exactly one basic concrete object exists, and other objects, if they exist, are derivative parts of the one basic object. The one basic object is typically regarded as the world and objects such as trees and leaves, cats and dogs, and planets and moons are said to be derivative parts of the world. To formalize priority monism, let ‘B’ denote the property of being a basic concrete object. We then get this:  $\exists x(Bx \ \& \ \forall y[B y \rightarrow x=y])$ . Priority monism directly contrasts with priority *pluralism*, which holds that there are at least two basic objects. Priority pluralism looks like this:  $\exists x \exists y (Bx \ \& \ B y \ \& \ x \neq y)$ . Finally, at least on the face of things, priority monism is consistent with existence pluralism, since existence pluralism concerns concrete objects in general, rather than basic concrete objects. But existence pluralists often claim that there are no priority relations among the plurality of concrete objects. In this case,

existence pluralism clashes with priority monism (and, of course, priority pluralism).

I have already indicated the first motivation for thinking Nietzsche might embrace priority monism: he appears to make statements that support monism about wholeness and pluralism about parts. The second reason is that he appears to accept a *priority* relation between the world and worldly parts. Priority designates hierarchy, which is typically understood as an irreflexive and transitive relation. For priority monists, there is an irreflexive and transitive relation between a single basic object and pluralities of nonbasic objects, such that those objects are grounded in, and existent only in virtue of, the single basic object.

There are two passages Nietzsche's notebooks that appear to support priority monism. The first we have seen numerous times: "Thinking is an action which takes apart what is really one," and "two halves of a thing are not the same as a whole" (KSA 11:40[38]). Reality seems to be "really one," or a single whole, and the fact that the halves do not constitute the whole could be leveled to support irreflexivity and transitivity between the whole and its parts. More textual evidence occurs in the following famous notebook entry:

And do you know what I take 'the world' to be? Shall I hold my mirror up to it? This world is a monster of force, without beginning or end, a fixed and invariable magnitude of force, no more, no less, which is never expended, merely transformed, of unalterable size as a whole, whose budget is without either expenses or losses, but likewise without gains or earnings, surrounded and bounded by 'nothingness'; it is nothing indefinite or dispersed, nothing infinitely extended, but rather a determinate amount of force set in a determinate space and not a space which would be 'empty' anywhere, but on the contrary a space everywhere filled with force, a play of forces and waves of forces, simultaneously the One and 'Many', waxing here and waning there, an ocean of tempestuous and torrential forces, forever changing, forever rolling back, with enormous periods of recurrence, with an ebb and flow of its configurations, bringing forth the most complex from the simplest, the most fiery, fierce and self-contradictory from the most still, rigid and cold and then from this profusion returning again to simplicity . . . This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And even you yourselves are this will to power—and nothing besides! (KSA 11:38[12])<sup>21</sup>

First, notice that many of these claims could be verified by the sciences. For example, Nietzsche's claim that the world is a "fixed and invariable magnitude of force" brings to mind the law of conservation of energy, and his claim that the world contains no "space which would be 'empty'"

<sup>21</sup> Hill translates 'Kraft' as 'energy,' whereas I translate it as 'force.'

anywhere” is long-debated by physicists. Thus, the passage does not seem to overstep the constraints of naturalism.

The passage appears to support priority monism. Nietzsche says that the world is “simultaneously the One and ‘Many.’” The world considered as *one* is the fundamental whole comprised of force (“*will to power*”). The whole has *many* parts that Nietzsche suggests are grounded in, and existent only in virtue of, the fundamental whole. Objects are comprised by the “ebb and flow of [the world’s] configurations” in the sense that the “most complex” derive from the “simplest.” This certainly appears to support some version of priority monism.

However, I think there is reason to question this reading. Recall that Nietzsche believes objects are groups of conceptually unified properties. This commitment has crucial consequences for understanding how he could be a priority monist. He would need to claim that taking the world to be a *single* object, specifically an object identical to all properties that emerge from interacting bundles of forces, depends on how we conceptualize experience. The same dependency relation between our practices and experience must hold for the world to be a single *basic* object—and again if objects such as trees and leaves are *derivative parts* of the world. To be a priority monist Nietzsche would therefore need to say that we take there to be exactly one fundamental object from which all other objects derive.

Here is the problem with this picture. Priority monists from antiquity to today predominantly assume words like ‘single,’ ‘basic,’ and ‘derivative,’ when applied to the concrete world, pick out mind-independent features of reality. But Nietzsche rejects such mind-independence. On his view, concepts do not reflect objects or relations between objects with determinate properties divorced from our practices. Rather, objects and relations between objects gain determinate properties through our practical activities. Objects—single or otherwise—exist when bundles of forces are conceptually organized in certain ways. Likewise, the state of affairs in which some object is basic to, ontologically prior to, or derivative of some other object exists when bundles of forces are conceptually organized in those ways. Relations like ‘basic’ and ‘derivative’ emerge with the construction of the relata. Such terms are *concepts* that we determine to have particular conditions of application. We have seen that for Nietzsche the application conditions of our concepts fix the properties of objects, which then fixes the property relations between objects. Determinately structured objects, and hence determinately structured relations between objects, depend on our practices.

This analysis enables us to better understand the long notebook passage above that seems to support priority monism. Taken alone, the passage

is neutral between the traditional, mind-independent version of priority monism and the nontraditional, mind-dependent version. But the nontraditional reading can make good sense of the text. The world is “simultaneously the One and ‘Many’” because we take ‘world’ to refer to a single object identical to the totality of forces, and objects such as trees and leaves are conceptually unified bundles of forces derived from that totality. We shape the “ebb and flow of [the world’s] configurations” into objects that stand in certain relations to other objects, perhaps even the world as a whole.

The takeaway is that although Nietzsche’s view of objects is inconsistent with existence monism, it can be rendered consistent with priority monism. But there is a crucial caveat. Insofar as priority monists deny the constructive power of our activities—and this denial is likely uniform<sup>22</sup>—priority monists and Nietzsche go their separate ways. Nietzsche’s view that we create objects puts the referents of ‘priority’ and ‘monist’ in our hands. If Nietzsche were a priority monist, then, he would most certainly be the apple furthest from the tree—so much so, I think, that such a reading is implausible.

This conclusion does not mean that Nietzsche is better read as a priority pluralist. There are two connected reasons for this. First, the remarks he makes which suggest that something in reality is basic, or exhibits the property of being fundamental, target *oneness* rather than *multiplicity*. Second, his comments regarding the construction of multiple objects make no mention of basicness. The existence of multiple basic objects might be vindicated were Nietzsche to claim that the world’s parts come prior to the world. But no passages on creating objects suggest that the multiplicity of objects works to constitute the whole. Rather, as we have seen, there is at least some textual evidence to think the direction goes the other way. Thus, if Nietzsche were to endorse some priority relation between objects, it would most likely take the form of priority monism. And, again, that reading faces problems.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Let me review the major conclusions of this paper. While commentators have long debated whether Nietzsche embraces *substance* monism, his take on *object* monism has largely been left by the wayside. A few readers broach the topic, but there has been no detailed investigation in the literature. At

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<sup>22</sup> This is obvious if Plato or Spinoza are taken to be priority monists, whereas for Hegel the case is less clear. Contemporary priority monists, perhaps most prominently Schaffer, are staunchly opposed to the view that objects are brought into existence through our representational practices.

first glance, this neglect seems warranted. After all, Nietzsche appears to associate monism with nihilism, and monism seems to violate naturalist constraints on inquiry. However, I have argued that neither holds weight. In fact, Nietzsche even seems to support influential arguments for object monism. The argument for existence monism Nietzsche appears to endorse holds that the world as a concrete whole sufficiently explains all worldly phenomena. In response, I suggested that, for Nietzsche, proper parts of the world are necessary for explanations of worldly phenomena because causal explanations require us to create objects. This implies that Nietzsche sides with existence pluralism. The argument for priority monism that Nietzsche seems to endorse holds that pluralities of objects exist, but they are derived from the whole. I argued that priority monism is compatible with Nietzsche's view that we construct objects. But given that Nietzsche thinks objects are created, there is not good reason to think he prefers priority monism to some alternative position, such as existence pluralism, which stipulates nothing about priority relations between objects. Priority relations, along with objects themselves, come into existence through our conceptual organization of experience. Nietzsche's opposition to object monism, then, which the secondary literature has more or less taken for granted, is certainly not immediately apparent. And although Nietzsche might finally come down against object monism, how he does so is also quite far from obvious.<sup>23</sup>

#### ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

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<sup>23</sup> My thanks to Teresa Kouri Kissel, Chad Weiner, and anonymous referees at *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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