

Article

Articulating Nietzsche's 'Aesth-Ethics' of Affirmation in an Age of Doubt

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Abstract: In this paper, I will attempt to articulate Nietzsche's recourse amidst the nihilism that cripples our sense of meaning. This paper will endeavor to re-contextualize Nietzsche's powerful and imaginative aesthetic theory of existence or what I will call "aesth-ethics" of affirmation—an artistic and stylish response amidst the gradual eclipse of thinking and the ambivalence to fully assume our fate. This response suggests that against the backdrop of today's magnified skepticism, art elevates, more than ever, its inimitable role to stimulate and inspire our numbing and dying relation to meaning and aspiration to live our lives and not to be lived by it.

Keywords: Nietzsche, death of God, affirmation of life, aesth-ethics

"Nothing is true, everything is permitted" but . . .

We are living in an epoch where the bells of World War II continue to echo, reminding us of the unimaginable atrocity that humanity can inflict upon the world. Accordingly, the shadows cast by modernity's monsters trigger the simple realization of the genesis and meaning of our post-modern consciousness: a consciousness in defense of the traumatic shock and atrocity that modernity has stamped onto our history. If there is a thing that we can single out as our main attitude today, it is this abhorrence to totality, to impositions, to declaration of a "truth" as Truth. Up to what extent can we stretch this form of skepticism?

The paradox of today's skepticism does not only appear as a symptom of universal disbelief, but, worse, it functions as a mask for our disavowed beliefs. We make fun of devotees, even of our own beliefs, but at the end of the day we still read our horoscopes, buy our lucky bracelets, we believe in ghosts, we even believe in soulmates when we fall in love. "Nothing is true, everything is permitted," we say, but it is today when Truth shatters across different fields, when information overflows from the internet, when communication is right in front of our faces through social

networking sites, that everything becomes prohibited! That is to say, everything becomes regulated and constricted: from politically incorrect terms, to ultra-historicizing of statements, the need to distance ourselves from our beliefs when we speak, down to the radical need to respect the beliefs of the others, demanding pretension and tolerance. We are so afraid to make a stand and engage this disconcerting ambivalence that we would rather choose to self-destruct into a mere phantom of pure cynicism that will forever secure itself within the ideological meadow of an unexamined life. As recourse, we try to find fulfillment in the contemporary trends of imperialist and capitalist gimmick: from consumerist trends, to our craving for the latest technologically advanced gadgets, including the latest fashion styles that amuse our sense of self-expression, making us believe that these are forms of freedom in our free market society.

Within the passive cage of our globalized shrinking world, how do we tackle this pressing deadlock? On the one hand, our profane celebration in front of the decaying image of God;¹ on the other hand, we are frozen in fear to assert fully this abyss of freedom that we are left with, which consequently steers us to revert to what Nietzsche calls “shadows of the dead God” or those institutions, which replaced God, functioning as underlying foundations of our way of looking at the world. How can we confront the paradoxical dilemma of our age without returning to our desire for certainty and support due to its impossibility?

I think Friedrich Nietzsche’s powerful and imaginative discourse will be very instructive here. In this paper, I will attempt to articulate

¹ I am following Nietzsche’s idea of God in his celebrated and controversial phrase, “God is dead.” Nietzsche does not naively deny the existence of God by logical proofs. On the contrary, Nietzsche puts to the fore the role of God in human history, that is to say, as a cultural, historical, social, and psychological expression of mankind. Ultimately, for Nietzsche, it is not the God of the gaps (in the Lacanian sense) but the God of the Symbolic who died, a God who symbolizes man’s metaphysical, moral, epistemological, and societal guarantor, providing every solution possible for us in order to function in our social space. See Gilles Deleuze *Nietzsche and Philosophy* trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) and Alenka Zupancic, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 35.

In this paper, God is very well synonymous with the idea of totality, that is, the transcendent hand that points to us what is True and not. We celebrate in front of its decaying body precisely because our skeptical attitude today simply can no longer believe in a totalizing edifice that presumes to be true all the time. Nietzsche provides an interesting insight on how we can make sense of believers today, even after the death of God. He writes: “How much one needs a faith in order to flourish, how much that is ‘firm’ and that one does not wish to be shaken because one clings to it... Christianity, it seems to me, is still needed by most people in old Europe even today; therefore, it still finds believers. For this is how man is: An article of faith could be refuted before him a thousand times – if he needed it, he would consider it ‘true’ again and again.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 347.

Nietzsche's recourse amidst the nihilism that cripples our sense of affirmation. Rather than repeating Nietzsche within his own context, I will try to re-contextualize his aesthetic theory of existence, or what I will call "aesth-ethics"² of affirmation in our time; that is to say, let us imagine how the contemporary world would appear to Nietzsche's eyes.

By an "aesth-ethics" of affirmation, using Nietzschean lens, we come to a full understanding of an artistic attitude towards the world and towards our own existence, through an affirmative glorification of our own creative power and singularity of lives. I will argue that today, more than ever, Nietzsche's "aesth-ethics" of affirmation resounds most beautifully, for it is only today that we are experiencing the full impact of what Nietzsche announced more than a hundred years ago—the collision of conscience:³ the ambivalence of belief!⁴ Nietzsche during his time has

² Ethics here does not mean morality or a set of rules and regulations that can determine whether something is good or evil. Nietzsche has his idiosyncratic characterization of ethics after the death of God. We can even say that the whole of Nietzsche's work can be characterized as a response to this death through ethics. According to Deleuze, Nietzsche's idea of ethics has an ethological basis, which goes beyond a moralistic ontology. His ethics presents, on the contrary, a way of dealing with life. This form of ethics does not reduce the person to whether his action is good or evil, but rather it is concerned with the whole character and behavior of the person. This ethics is not only an ethics of behavior, but also of thinking. Nietzsche characterized a person whether he is sick or healthy, that is, whether his whole constitution affirmatively looks at life or negatively denies and resents it. On the other hand, art for Nietzsche is this affirmative power to live our lives with full affirmation. In this precise sense, by "aesth-ethics" I mean Nietzsche's theory of an affirmative existence, an affirmative way of living and looking at the world. For Nietzsche's idea of ethics, see Paolo Bolaños, "Nietzsche, Spinoza, and the Ethological Conception of Ethics," in *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (2007), 113-125, <<http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol11/Deleuze.pdf>>.

³ Nietzsche's prophetic, even megalomaniacal, declaration in *Ecce Homo*, his autobiography of pure affirmation, is beginning to make creep into our society today. He writes: "I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous – a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against* everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: Why I am Destiny*, in *On The Genealogy of Moral and Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House Inc., 1967), IV, 1.

⁴ The paradox here cannot simply be reduced to whether a certain idea, a thing is believable or not, but precisely the very nature of belief today. Today, more than ever, we believe but always at the back of our cynical selves. We usually hide our beliefs in the form of jokes, mockeries and so on in order to be distanced from it. However, we still cling to these beliefs silently, for amidst the destructive tendencies of *via negativa*, we have no other choice but to see the meaning beneath reality's nothingness, that "man needs teachers and teachings of a 'purpose' in life: man has to believe, to know, from time to time why he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life – without faith in reason in life." But this belief is nonetheless profoundly informed by other people, for if we look at ourselves closely, we are cynical to the different forms of belief – as if believing is, at once, ignorance and radical imposition. As another form of distancing, we can only strongly believe because some people believe in it and we are perplexed by how this belief transforms a person. For quoted

already foreseen this deadlock that modernity has to face and engage fully. He calls us to think against the backdrop of this growing skepticism,⁵ demanding us to live our existence artistically and affirmatively, which envisions to revitalize and to de-alienate our inherent creative impulse without superimposing our most intimate confessions on other people. Moreover, we are encouraged to assert fully our existential engagement with the world by taking our lives as artworks. But what does this mean?

Creativity, Values, and Freedom

For Nietzsche, reality is a meaningless void waiting to be woven with sense and interpretation. From this nothingness and suffering, man strives to survive the horrors of the incomprehensible vastness of reality's mystery and its absurd catastrophes. As Nietzsche would put it, to live is to suffer and to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. But through man's incessant urge to question, to find meaning amidst vagueness and chaos, he invents a world to shelter him—he creates a world that he could call his own reality. Man finds this meaning through his capacity for creativity.⁶

The human being, for Nietzsche, is an artist that gives birth to the world—he alone is the source and the cause of the beauty of the world.⁷ Apparently, viewed from this standpoint, the world itself becomes the human being's greatest artwork. This power inherent in the human being to rise above the meaninglessness of nature suggests that art is not simply our capacity to imitate nature. Instead, art can be understood as a fundamental capacity without which reality itself will be rendered unlivable, "for it is

passage see, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, I, 1. For a philosophical discussion of how we believe today see Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵ Nietzsche writes in *The Will to Power*: "Every belief is a considering-something-true...The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that every belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*...To this extent, nihilism, as a denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a *divine way of thinking*." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power* trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 15.

⁶ This is in contra distinction to his predecessor, Arthur Schopenhauer, who sees man as characterized by a lack – that is, man cannot and should not will, for willing and expending power have catastrophic consequences. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, man ontologically wants to express his power, for he is filled with power. For Nietzsche, life is not will to life, but will to power. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V, 357 and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II, 12. Laurence Lampert gave a very interesting analysis regarding how Nietzsche conceived, not only man, but life as such. He writes: "'To be is to be energy' – that is, packets or quanta of energy are the ultimate constituents of everything that can be said to be. Energy quanta have describable qualities: inherent in them is a drive to express themselves, to expand, discharge, multiply, articulate their strength." Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Philosophy and True Religion*, in *A Companion to Nietzsche* ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 138.

⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, II, Critique of Religion.

only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified.”⁸

The human being orders reality through his ideas even creating a chasm between nature and culture in order to appease himself, to hide himself from the absurdity of life.⁹ From his ordering, he also considers the values that would give direction to human societies, providing a self-sufficient mechanism for mankind to communicate and understand reality from an anthropomorphized eye. These values, over a long period of time, decided the fate of humanity’s existence, convincing them to believe that these values are inherently true, moving civilizations to consider these as values-in-themselves.¹⁰ In this context, it is not really an exaggeration to say that humanity has been moved by ideas. However, Nietzsche also highlights the fact that the anthropomorphic origin of values is forgotten in time. With this forgetfulness, man thought he was deciphering reality as such, imposing his frail artistic descriptions to the whole of mankind in order to manipulate them in believing that Truth can be established for all.¹¹

Nietzsche, however, already sounded the tuning fork and the contemporary skeptical discourse today seemingly echoes this decisive effort to awaken us from our slumbering alienation. It reminds the human being of his own forgetfulness regarding his incapacity to grasp reality as such. In other words, all our renditions of reality are mere subjective interpretations to make sense of what we see and feel about the world. In this sense, our language is only a medium of description on how reality can

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1967), 5.

⁹ Nietzsche has laid several all-too-human crafts that have been considered hitherto true: consider cause and effect, metaphysical world, Being over becoming, mental categories etc. He criticizes such human arrogance and ignorance that it forgets its own roots, namely, that man intentionally forgets that he is only an artistically creating subject and not a provider of truth. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, trans. by Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc. 1990), 35.

¹⁰ Nietzsche provides a very interesting insight why human beings forget how things truly are. This is also the reason why his polemic and critique of Western morality and metaphysics was done through a genealogical investigation. He writes: “The utility of the unegoistic action is supposed to be the source of the approval accorded it, and this source is supposed to have been forgotten – but how is this forgetting possible?... this utility has rather been an everyday experience at all times, therefore something that has been underlined again and again: consequently, instead of fading from consciousness, instead of becoming easily forgotten, it must have been impressed on the consciousness more and more clearly.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *On The Genealogy of Moral and Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House Inc., 1967), I, 2.

¹¹ Nietzsche, “Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,” 81.

be communicated and not a total adequation of what reality is,¹² for reality is totally indifferent to human language!

But Nietzsche goes beyond the skeptical discourse of cynical resignation. For Nietzsche, what we must not forget is our aesthetic relation to the world. By affirming this, we come to an understanding that all of our ideas are not Truths, but mere interpretations. What we consider as true is but a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, the sum of human relations that have been poetically and rhetorically intensified. Truths are illusions which one has forgotten to be illusions.¹³ This assumes the impossibility of objective Truth, of metaphysical Truth. But this also gives way for the courage to interpret the world again, to escape our cynical skepticism. By having the courage to fully engage the world again, new possibilities can be created without falling into the same trap of objectivity.

In other words, Nietzsche's challenge springs from the need for honesty: to accept that our relation to the world is always-already mediated and informed by our physiological background, even ideological constraints. For Nietzsche, we always-already proceed in looking at the world through a particular lens, a particular perspective, fashioning the world according to it. These perspectives are profoundly influenced by the values and world-views we either consciously or unconsciously uphold, defining how we look at the world. What defines truth, therefore, is no longer the epistemological truths of objectivity, but an existential truth-effect that can inspire and convince other people.

In this precise sense, Nietzsche highlights that truths or values accompany power and beauty, and not objectivity—a power to move and convince another person that what you are articulating is something that makes sense and that which he can relate with. This strongly suggests that “everything depends on the value and sense of what we think.”¹⁴ Accordingly, it also acknowledges and affirms the multiplicity of truths—a perspectival epistemology that prioritizes not objectivity, but value-laden existential truths, profoundly influenced by one's background, which can persuade other people.

What Nietzsche's aesthetic theory of existence conveys is that, yes, God has died and we can no longer revive this God. For how can we revive an artistic creation that imposes itself as necessary and objective if

¹² Nietzsche follows Kant and Schopenhauer in their claim that we cannot know reality as such. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Marcus Weigelt (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 265-266; Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, I*, trans. by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., Ltd, 1950), 3.

¹³ Nietzsche, “Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” 1, 29-30.

¹⁴ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 104.

objectivity and necessity brings about unprecedented consequences much like Stalinist Communism's historical necessity or the so-called Aryan race of Germany? We are but condemned to our freedom.

But upon a closer look of this event, this also gives way to our independence to assume full responsibility in dealing with the perplexing world. The realization of the death of such discourse of totality revives our artistic supplement, opening, again, the infinite seas for the sailors of knowledge to risk venturing into their boundless innocence.

With the full affirmation of the death of God and our capacity for creativity, we can now understand that interpretations do no rest on objectivity, but on subjective convictions informed by one's physiological background. Through this, instead of domination and debate about the Truth, we can, instead, employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretation in the service of knowledge.¹⁵ Our creativity will no longer be an arrogant imposition of our most personal opinion on another lesser mortal due to our descending and reactive character; but rather, just like an artist whose main concern is not whether he is accepted or not, we will only express an overflowing creativity and beauty through learning receptively from the world in order to understand different perspectives. Such an attitude can help us fashion our lives into a work of art affirmatively.¹⁶

Self-Creation as Aesthetic Existence

Nietzsche highlight's not only our aesthetic relation to the world but also our aesthetic relation to ourselves. Just like any artwork, to truly live our lives beautifully, it presupposes an originality that joyously transcends the common way of living. By compounding a wide range of inspirational perspectives and ideas, we will be able to fertilize our own soil in preparation for our own forest to bloom. But "One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream without becoming impure."¹⁷ That is to say, this period of learning and struggling with ideas should still remind us of the

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 12.

¹⁶ Nietzsche is very precise in terms of characterizing the fundamental genesis of art, namely, man. Nietzsche not only considers two modes of being, but even the very expression of these two. Art can be based on the expression of an ascending being or a descending being. The expression of the ascending being is an affirmative form of art, which is based on his affirmative will to power. Affirmative will to power is: "The victorious concept "force," by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as "will to power," i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power; as a creative drive, etc." Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 333.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue, 3.

silent scream of our conscience: "What does your conscience say? You shall become who you are!"¹⁸ –a scream for originality.

However, the crucial point that we should not miss here is how Nietzsche articulates it: "become who you are," in contra-distinction to "become what you want." For "become what you want" presupposes an absolute freedom over oneself, particularly in the task of creating oneself. But Nietzsche asserts that "absolute freedom of the will, absent of fate, would make man into a god."¹⁹ "Become who you are" is not a matter of making oneself on the basis of an absolute ontological freedom (as Sartre famously insists).²⁰ Thus, in Nietzsche's conception of self-creation, as in the case of his idea of the interplay of forces within life, he places the idea of fate as a necessary ingredient in creating oneself. But what is fate for Nietzsche? "Fate is nothing else but a chain of events;²¹ and fate always prescribes the principle that 'Events are determined by events.'"²² Nietzsche, through his historical philosophizing, saw the complexities of the interplay of forces, and the limit of environment from which one is constituted. But it does not end in total resignation to fate. Nietzsche, in addition, mentions the idea of second nature and its part in playing with man's self-creation.

Through affirming the limits of one's fate, one becomes who one is through getting to know oneself, and by getting to know the conditions under which one operates.²³ As an affirmative artist of one's own life, one needs to indicate the primacy of intellectual honesty in creating oneself, for only in this way can we truly love our fate. However, our originality will only truly flourish if we beautifully weave our lives through inputting in our second nature—a nature which have been the result of all the things we have come to admire in our lives, of the aspirations that motivate us to take our lives a lot more seriously. That is to say, although we need to acknowledge the limits of our fate, it should not be an excuse to hinder living our lives to the full. For, truly, a great amount of willingness and agency is needed in order to be able to create oneself. And through such intense and constant practice, one discovers one's own uniqueness amidst the entirety of the manifold. In other words, one can be a being that is able to give oneself his own laws.²⁴ Nietzsche writes:

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 270 and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, IV, I.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Freedom of Will and Fate," in *The Nietzsche Reader: Freedom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 17.

²⁰ Robert Solomon, *Nietzsche's Fatalism, A Companion to Nietzsche* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 420.

²¹ Nietzsche, "Freedom of Will and Fate," 16.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, "Fate and History," in *The Nietzsche Reader*, 15.

²³ Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche on Art* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 129.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 335.

One thing is needful. – To “give style” to one’s character is a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weakness delights the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature that has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it.²⁵

That life, no matter how great or small, if it is turned to a life of “thus, I willed it!” becomes the most profound idea of self-affirmation, an aesthetic existence *par excellence*! In this sense, Nietzsche has laid down to us the new imperative: “This – is just my way: – where is yours? Thus I answered those who asked of me ‘the way.’ For the way – does not exist!²⁶ You powerful one: may your goodness be your ultimate self-overpowering!”²⁷ We can see that “even life’s mistakes have their own meaning and value. . . . That it slowly leads back from out of the side roads and wrong turns, it gets the individual qualities and virtues ready [which] will prove to be indispensable as means to the whole.”²⁸ Creativity is not simply ingenuity, but it is also experimentation, fall, and sublimation. Nietzsche writes:

And so onwards along the path of wisdom, with a hearty tread, a hearty confidence! However you may be, be your own source of experience! Throw off your discontent about your nature; forgive yourself your own self, for you have in it a ladder with a hundred rungs, on which you can climb to knowledge . . . You have it in your power to merge everything you have lived through – attempts, false starts, errors, delusions, passions, your love and your hope – into your goal, with nothing left over.²⁹

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 13.

²⁸ Cf. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, III, 9 in Ridley’s *Nietzsche on Art*, 137.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 292.

Nietzsche's 'Aesth-Ethics' of Affirmation

Art is not only an artifact that can be displayed in museums and collected by rich people, but rather, it is an inner power, an attitude in engaging the world. The inspiring lesson that we can glean from an artistic attitude is the radical dwindling of the importance of objective Truth and certainty and an elevation of beauty and power. Moreover, it stimulates our receptivity and independence, allowing us to interpret the world aesthetically, filling up the nostalgia that is brought about by existence as such.

By simply living our own life towards the path of greatness, we are able to communicate our stance, inspire, and touch other people without imposing our most personal will on them. Although art is more commonly construed as a subjective expression of one's life, it is, nonetheless, also an expression of the universality of the human condition. This is the communicability of art—its existential truth effect. In the case of literary pieces, although they are written by other people, we can relate to them—we can even be moved and be inspired by them. Every great work of art has the ability to be re-contextualized and continually stimulate different people. This very ability conveys that we can learn from it, that we can create our own, and that we can derive our own meaning from it. Perhaps, the reason why we refer to great literary works as “classics” is because they speak to different generations, while each generation is able to own a classical work by invigorating it giving it, new life and meaning, keeping it alive.

More than this, art also affirms our capacity to create and direct our own lives, mustering everything we have learned about the world. By assuming this capacity, we can be more existentially engaged with our lives, inducing us to generate our own convictions to uphold. Being unique human beings who are artistically created, our lives will be like novels which can inspire others to live their own lives to the full. Just like our serious professors, mentors, or parents, even great people or characters in novels who lived their lives creatively, they have given us eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each of us can become someday. It is they who taught us to esteem the hero that is concealed in everyday characters. It is they who taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes.³⁰

These two expressions of Nietzsche's “aesth-ethics” of affirmation, namely our aesthetic relation to the world, and our aesthetic relation to ourselves, elevate the power of art's subjectivity, without being trapped in our solipsism. Rather, it pushes us to engage and emanate our own creativity with mankind. For, unlike dogmatism's universality which

³⁰ *Op cit.*, II, 78.

integrates and encompasses everything, artistic universality radiates and edifies the people around you. This is the power of art that Nietzsche wants to address—it changes your whole existence without lifting a finger!

Nietzsche in the Age of Doubt

Amidst the nihilistic deadlock of our cynical and pretentious form of belief today, we are at once dumbfounded by such obstruction. In today's contracted world, we would rather find a decent job and live quietly, ignoring the big questions that haunt us every day. Upon seeing that the ultimate foundation of our certainty has collapsed, we would rather wear a strait jacket and hide in business companies, than be wounded eagles who will risk the fall just to fly again. Is this not the case for our hedonism today, which wants the pleasure but evades the necessary engagement? That is to say, we want love, but without the fall; we also want beer, but without the alcohol; coffee, but without the caffeine; milk, but non-fat milk; candy, but sugar-free?

What Nietzsche's aesth-ethics of affirmation wants to communicate is the necessity for the full affirmation of one's own condition, without evading the necessary engagement, but rather making the most out of it. We can no longer revert back to the "shadows of the dead God" in order to shelter us, for have we not yet learned the possible consequence of such return? We are but riveted to our condition, the break has happened, and we need to press on. But Nietzsche did not leave us empty-handed. He reminded us of our inner capacity, the capacity for art and creativity. He urges us to "follow our own self faithfully."³¹ The paradox of Nietzsche's message is that only by following our own selves faithfully can we become truly for everyone.

The sound of Nietzsche's aesth-ethics of affirmation creates a new tone in listening to the music of our perplexing age today. His song repeatedly echoes the challenge to think for ourselves, in order to engage this life seriously by fully assuming our fate. We should be tight-rope walkers, human beings that can risk walking without the support of universality and assured recognition—including Nietzsche's affirmative music. For indeed, by walking in the dangerous road less traveled, we can venture to edify some brave souls to trigger their capabilities for art. Artistry is not merely the creation of artifacts; it is an attitude towards life; it is what you do when you are truly alive!

³¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 7.

For Nietzsche, evading the responsibility that this abyss of freedom calls for is what triggers nihilism. Instead of simply resigning from thinking and tolerance in order to dodge the possibility of violence, Nietzsche, instead, endorses the affirmation of creativity. For only creativity to generate new possibilities beyond what is already provided by the past can help us face the ambivalent paradoxes of our present predicaments. This is the challenge of Nietzsche: to die while one has not yet started living or to live beyond our deaths through greatness?

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