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## Metaphysician, Philosopher, Psychologist? — Making Sense of Nietzsche's Sense-Making

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper argues that Moore's compelling reading of Nietzsche as a metaphysician in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (EMM) largely ignores Nietzsche's philosopher-psychologist approach to metaphysical, general sense-making. Nietzsche's metaphysical sense-making is often psychologically framed, i.e. sense is made of sense-making as the expression of specific psychological perspectives and types. Nietzsche's own most general "acts of sense-making", such as the will to power, nihilism, and eternal return, often need to be interpreted as targeting specific perspectives and types with the goal of affecting their values. Section 2 considers Moore's definition of metaphysics and asks what evidence there is that Nietzsche is a metaphysician in his inclusivistic sense. Section 3 provides evidence that Nietzsche pursues a psychological project and introduces the idea of "psychological framing". Sections 4–6 argue that Moore takes will to power (4), nihilism as suffering (5), and eternal return (6) as Nietzsche's own, most general "metaphysical" sense-making, thereby neglecting the philosopher-psychologist who may elude Moore's inclusivist conception of metaphysics.

Actually, to explain how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about, it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is he –) getting at? Consequently, I do not believe that a “drive for knowledge” is the father of philosophy, but rather that another drive, here as elsewhere, used knowledge (and mis-knowledge!) merely as a tool. (BGE 6)

Psychology is now again the way to the fundamental problems. (BGE 23)<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a seminal article, Bernard Williams once urged his readers to keep in mind that “even when [Nietzsche] sounds insistently or shrilly expository, he is not necessarily telling us something, but urging us to ask something” (Williams 2006: 7). In his impressive *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (hereafter EMM), Adrian Moore offers a reading of Nietzsche that seemingly ignores Williams’ advice and treats central concepts (such as the will to power, nihilism, and eternal return) as Nietzsche’s radically-innovative, first-order metaphysical “acts of sense-making”. While Moore’s book cannot be praised enough for its contribution to our understanding of modern metaphysics and its history, in this paper I wish to argue that Moore’s reading of Nietzsche as a metaphysician largely neglects Nietzsche’s philosopher-psychologist approach, which may be crucial for an appreciation of his philosophical project and may also complicate Nietzsche’s place in Moore’s evolution of modern metaphysics.

Nietzsche often relies on what I wish to call the psychological framing of metaphysical ideas. By this I mean, first, that he treats traditional metaphysical ideas as expressions of the perspectives of psychological types, and second, that his own metaphysical ideas are not necessarily his own perspectival pieces of metaphysics, but instead tools for the philosopher-psychologist who aims to affect and destabilize the values of such perspectives and types. The structure of the paper is as follows: in Section 2, I briefly introduce Moore’s definition of metaphysics and ask what evidence

there is that Nietzsche is a metaphysician in Moore's sense. In Section 3, I show that Nietzsche pursues an important psychological project and provide some examples of Nietzsche's psychological framing. In Sections 4–6, I argue that Moore neglects the psychological Nietzsche and treats Nietzsche's central concepts of the will to power (Section 4), nihilism and suffering (Sections 5.1 and 5.2), and eternal return (Section 6) as first-order metaphysical sense-making.

## 2. A METAPHYSICIAN IN MOORE'S SENSE?

Moore's definition of metaphysics as “the most general attempt to make sense of things” aims at maximal inclusiveness. Even those opposed to traditional metaphysics because they regard metaphysics primarily as the non-sensible business of making sense of what is transcendent (cf. Moore's “The Transcendence Question”) are to be included in the evolution of modern metaphysics. As Moore asserts:

I want my conception of metaphysics not only to cover as much as possible of what self-styled metaphysicians have been up to, but also to cover a range of practices which seem to me profitably classified in the same way even though the practitioners themselves have not conceived what they were doing in those terms (EMM, 6)

For Moore, our most general ways of making sense of things can be improved (EMM, 12), and the way in which metaphysics contributes is “by providing us with radically new concepts by which to live” (EMM, 20). Nietzsche, despite his open opposition to traditional metaphysics, is to be included because he is making *radically new* sense of things. While Nietzsche scores low on “transcendence” (because he thinks that most of traditional metaphysics' interest in the transcendent is nonsense—not the kind of “nonsense” that Moore regards as acceptable nonsense, like transcendental idealism in Moore's sense), he actually scores high on what Moore regards the other two crucial battlegrounds of metaphysics, “novelty” and “creativity” (cf. EMM, 9). Nietzsche is the beginning of a new metaphysical paradigm, a paradigm of making sense of things that prioritizes difference and change over identity. While it is difficult, Moore argues, for the analytic philosopher “to think of difference in anything other than negative terms”, Nietzsche offers a “*positive* construal of difference, as something

that betokens affirmation and something that is itself to be affirmed” (EMM, 400).<sup>2</sup> He goes even further when he argues that, for Nietzsche, difference and change are “the very character of reality” (EMM, 399). Many would agree (myself included)<sup>3</sup> that Nietzsche emphasizes and affirms difference over identity and yet, on precisely these grounds, disagree with Moore’s way of including Nietzsche as a general sense-maker. After all, Nietzsche often emphasises the other side of sense-making: contingency, chaos and disorder, the disunity of “persons”, the constitutive role of drives and affects that undermine our alleged general sense-making abilities and explain Nietzsche’s call for multi- and inter-disciplinary sense-making that includes philology, anthropology, physiology, psychology, history, genealogy, etc. Take, for example, a famous passage from *The Gays Science* (GS), which seems to challenge Moore’s inclusion of Nietzsche on the grounds of “creativity” and “novelty”. Here Nietzsche emphasizes chaos and actually rejects change, and, worse, claims that it would be dangerous to hope for any novelty and creativity:

The total character of the world [...] is for all eternity chaos [...] the whole musical mechanism repeats eternally its tune, which must never be called a melody [...] Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness or unreason or their opposites [...] Let us [even] beware of thinking that the world eternally creates new things [...] (GS 109)

This seems to suggest that Nietzsche may not actually be interested in metaphysics in Moore’s sense, i.e. high-level, general, and presumably non-arbitrary attempts at radically new sense-making. But there is also evidence that Nietzsche saw himself as engaged in general sense-making. For example, in an 1884 letter to his friend Overbeck, when still thinking about writing a *magnum opus* entitled “The Will to Power” (which I will discuss further in Section 4), he writes:

If I manage to go to Sils-Maria this summer I will embark on a revisiting of my Metaphysica and epistemological views. I will now have to go through a number of disciplines, because I have decided to use the next five years for the elaboration of my “philosophy” for which I have built an entrance hall with my Zarathustra (Letter to Overbeck, April 1884; KSB 6: 504)

Passages like the above exist but they are rare. Already in 1868 Nietzsche conceived of metaphysics (which he viewed, contrary to Moore's inclusive conception, as narrowly aiming at "absolute truth") as "a need of the heart" (*Gemüthsbedürfnis*), the domain of *Begriffsdichtung* ("conceptual fabrication"), on a par with art and religion:

The realm of metaphysics, and herewith the province of "absolute" truth has without doubt been brought on a par with poetry and religion. He who wants to know something, is self-consciously content with the known relativity of knowledge — as, for example, are notable natural scientists. Metaphysics thus belongs for some to the realm of the needs of the heart (*Gemüthsbedürfnisse*), is essentially edification: for others it is art, namely that of concepts-fabrication (*Begriffsdichtung*): it is to be noted that metaphysics neither as religion nor as art has anything to do with the so-called "true in itself or that which has being (*Seiendem*). (Letter to Deussen, April/May 1868; KSB 2: 568)

Moore might point out that already here *Begriffsdichtung* could be rendered more positively as "concept creation", precisely one of the "practices" that Moore, who approves of Deleuze's conception of metaphysics, wishes to include in his own conception. Nietzsche's works are littered with passages that indicate that what interests him above all is not first-order, general sense-making but rather what he detects as an omnipresent and deep-seated, incorporated (*einverleibt*) "need for metaphysics"<sup>4</sup> that drives metaphysicians' of different breeds to their usually far too general, far too staticist attempts to make sense of things. Why is it that human beings, the kind of thing we are, cannot content themselves with—let alone flourish on—much more local sense-making? (I shall come back to this question briefly at the end.)

Nietzsche repeatedly diagnoses this "metaphysical need" for sense-making of the most general kind as highly problematic (e.g. BGE 6 and 12). While he does see this need as deep-seated—it has become a kind of settled, acculturated disposition—he does not view it as necessary (sense-making is, but our most general attempts of sense-making might be no longer). Instead, he views most of our metaphysical attempts as pathological, and asks if there is anything that could be done about our obsession with sense-making.<sup>5</sup> In his attempts to make sense of the need of general sense-making—and this is my main contention—he might no longer be writing as a metaphysician in Moore's sense. There is plenty of evidence that his writings are

perhaps better conceived as those of a philosopher-psychologist whose interests is to diagnose and cure by, as he puts it in *Ecce Homo* (EH), “putting the axe at the roots of this ‘metaphysical need’” (EH MA 6).

### 3. THE PHILOSOPHER-PSYCHOLOGISTS’ PROJECT

At pivotal points in his later writings, Nietzsche explicitly denies that he is primarily a philosopher, let alone a metaphysician. Philosophers past and present, he claims, have been under the spell of their *metaphysische Begriffsdichtungen*, their factitious concepts, that they use to prop up their embodied and embedded (to use terminology from contemporary cognitive science) moral values with seemingly secure ontological and epistemological foundations. In his attempt to unravel this unholy alliance between morality and metaphysics, Nietzsche makes it clear that he sees himself first and foremost as a psychologist—and not just any psychologist: in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE) he refers to himself as a “born psychologist” (BGE 58), in *Ecce Homo* (EH) as the “psychologist without equal” (EH “Books” 5), and in one of his final letters as the “first psychologist of Christianity” (No. 1151 to Brandes, 20 November 1888). This is not to say that Nietzsche does not envisage any role for philosophy. As he formulates it in the important “Note” at the end of Essay 1 of *The Genealogy of Morality* (GM), the “future task” (*Zukunftsaufgabe*) of philosophers is “to solve *the problem of value*” and “to determine the rank ordering of values” (GM 1 17). As this note makes clear, Nietzsche does *not* believe that he has addressed either issue. Instead, in GM, he issues a call for an interdisciplinary research project to *all* sciences, recommending that they should work together toward philosophy’s principal task. For him, however, engagement in psychology—which he argues should be “recognized again as master of all sciences”—is vital for identifying the fundamental problem in the first place. He could not be any clearer than when he states, “Psychology is now again the way to the fundamental problems” (BGE 23).

The philosopher-psychologist Nietzsche, who experiments with novel, naturalistic working hypotheses of the person, a hypothesis that should not be regarded as *reductively* naturalistic,<sup>6</sup> does not feature in Moore’s account. As is well known, Nietzsche conceives of the self as a *Gesellschaftsbau* (“social structure”) and *Gemeinwesen* (“community” or “commonwealth”) of drives and affects (BGE 12 and 19). As he puts it:

the path lies open for new versions and sophistications of the soul hypothesis – and concepts like the “mortal soul” and the “soul as subject-multiplicity” and the “soul as a society constructed out of drives and affects” want henceforth to have civil rights in the realm of science. By putting an end to the superstition that until now has grown around the idea of the soul with an almost tropical luxuriance, the new psychologist clearly thrusts himself into a new wasteland and a new suspicion. The old psychologists might have found things easier and more enjoyable –: but, in the end, the new psychologist knows by this very token that he is condemned to invention—and, who knows? perhaps to discovery (BGE 12)

Rather than something supra-natural, immortal and singular, Nietzsche conceives of the soul—a concept he thinks should be retained—as natural, mortal, and multiple. “Natural” should not to be misunderstood as reducible to physics or neuroscience; “multiple” should be understood as composed of a multitude of drives and affects, some of which inborn (e.g., the human hunger or the sex drive) and others acculturated (historical drive, drive for knowledge); and finally “ordered” should be understood functionally, analogous to a society working towards (and often failing to) achieving certain goals. Nietzsche’s psychological proposals are speculative—some more so than others—but they inform much of his mature philosophical writings. And while it would go beyond the scope of this paper to offer any systematic appraisal of what we may call Nietzsche’s historical thesis, namely that the soul would be better conceived of as a society of drives and affects, this historical thesis was clearly extremely important to him and is used by him in many of his explanations of phenomena like a kind of heuristic.<sup>7</sup> What I mean by “heuristic” or “heuristic technique” is a “strategy or method for approaching problems”. We have a wealth of textual evidence that Nietzsche’s strategy or method for approaching traditional philosophical problems is to reframe them, often using drive descriptions (What is a self? What is the soul? What is willing? What does valuing look like, etc.?). He seems to think that if his re-descriptions are successful, the problems themselves undergo changes, and solutions (if still required after such re-descriptive therapy) turn out to be different. — Much more would need to be said here. For our purposes it is not necessary to offer a defence of Nietzsche’s drive psychology. It is sufficient to emphasise that



Nietzsche's explanations of a great number of phenomena, in particular the metaphysical ideas of others, as well as his own, should be seen as *framed* in significant ways by his speculative psychology. Let's call this *psychological framing*:

*Psychological framing:*

Metaphysical ideas are explained in a psychologically framed way as expressions of the psychological perspectives or types. Nietzsche own "metaphysical" concepts and ideas are not simply his own general acts of sense-making but psychologically framed tools with the aim to affect the perspectives of specific perspectives and types. Nietzsche's philosophical style is essentially related to the psychological framing of the ideas of others as well as his own.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note here that Moore acknowledges what is known as Nietzsche's perspectivism. Perspectivism, according to Moore, "denies the possibility of any disengaged, disinterested sense-making" (EMM, 379).<sup>9</sup> Sense-making is thus always performed "in relation to some constellation of needs, interests, sensibilities, concerns, values, and the like" (EMM, 379). In this sense, Moore also acknowledges, though he does not make it explicit, that for Nietzsche metaphysical ideas are perspectivally framed. However, as already indicated, psychological framing goes further than this. First, Nietzsche often refers to what is best termed as types, such as the philosopher, the priest, the ascetic, the Christian, the noble, etc. Second, framing extends also to his own metaphysical ideas, his own general attempts of sense-making. He self-reflectively sees his own sense-making as influenced by the type or types to which he himself belongs, and he may not be interested primarily in offering novel "acts of sense-making" from *his* own perspective (as we will see, Moore focuses on will to power as a cosmological principle, nihilism as meaningless suffering, and eternal return as a condition of sense-making). He focuses on the uncovering of psychological types to create ideas that affect and transform *their* sense-making. As part of the psychological Nietzsche's project, then, his own concepts and ideas are precisely not free-standing, novel and creative acts of sense-making, maximally general from his point of view. Instead, they are designed to target specific perspectives with the goal of affecting their points of view.

Let us look at a few examples of Nietzsche's psychological framing of traditional metaphysical ideas. As early as *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (PTAG) Nietzsche is explicit about his criterion for selecting certain thinkers and metaphysical ideas: they are valuable even if we no longer regard them as true expressions of a particular type that he calls "the great human being". He thus prefaces his short history of Greek philosophy with the following disclaimer:

I want to select from each system the point that is a piece of personality [...] the task is to bring to light that which we have to love and honour always and what cannot be taken away through later insight: the great human being (PTAG Introduction).<sup>10</sup>

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche's framing is even more explicit. Metaphysics, he writes,

may always be considered first of all as symptoms of certain bodies; [...] they give the historian and psychologist all the more valuable hints as symptoms of the body, of its success or failure, its fullness, power and highhandedness in history, or of its frustrations, fatigues, impoverishments, its premonitions of the end, its will to an end. (GS Preface 2; CUP: 5-6).

In a later note "On the *psychology of metaphysics*. The influence of *timidity*", Nietzsche argues that fear and resentment have been the psychological causes underlying traditional sense-making by metaphysicians:

That which has been feared the most, the cause of the most powerful suffering [...] has been eliminated from the true world [...] In the same way they have feared change, transitoriness: this expresses a straitened soul full of mistrust and evil experiences (N 1888, KSA 13, 18[16])<sup>11</sup>

Metaphysicians, he argues—central to his explanation of ascetic morality in GM—are driven by the affect of resentment, and "the resentment of the metaphysicians is here creative" (N 1887, KSA 12, 8[2]). BGE 6 and BGE 23, cited as epigraphs, leave no doubt that Nietzsche regards his new psychological method as "the way to the fundamental problems" (BGE 23). In *Twilight of Idols: How to Philosophize with a Hammer*

(TI), Nietzsche refers to himself as “this old psychologist” who—with his diagnostic, geologist’s hammer—wants to sound out that which always wants to stay silent in past ideals and idols (TI Preface). His method, which he calls “symptomology”, aims to cure such perspectival self-blindness to “reveal [...] the most valuable realities of cultures and inner worlds (*Innerlichkeiten*) of those who did not know enough to ‘understand’ themselves” (TI “Improvers” 1).

In the above cases, which I do not have the space to discuss here in detail, Nietzsche treats traditional metaphysical ideas as framed expressions of psychological types and their perspectival values. While Nietzsche’s framing of metaphysical ideas and the metaphysician type is perhaps not made explicit by Moore, it is compatible with his account: Nietzsche is opposed to traditional sense-making (which he unmasks as asceticist),<sup>12</sup> and then, this is the picture that emerges from Moore, he engages in his own, non-asceticist, creative and novel sense-making. As I will argue in sections 4–6, Moore interprets “will to power”, “nihilism”, and “eternal return” precisely as pieces of Nietzsche’s own, radical, creative and novel metaphysical sense-making without paying much attention to their psychological framing.

#### 4. NIETZSCHE’S ACT OF SENSE-MAKING: THE WILL TO POWER

Nietzsche’s own metaphysical vision is, according to Moore, very different from the ascetic ideal’s “act of sense-making”. Nietzsche’s “metaphysical vision,” according to Moore, is best expressed in a famous passage from Nietzsche’s unpublished notes, WP 1067. Disregarding the style of presentation, Moore renders the content of Nietzsche’s unpublished note as follows:

The world consists of a mass of interacting forces subject to continual change. There is no unity within the world, no identity, no stasis, save what is imposed on it by interpretation. The will to power is not itself a force. It is a cosmological principle that produces and is manifest in the ever-changing relations between forces. The will to power is what ultimately interprets and makes sense of things. It does this by literally making the differences between forces and evaluating them in relation to one another [...] Individual subjects are themselves nothing more than creatures of the will-to-power’s own ultimate sense-making. And they make sense of things only insofar as that is

how sense is made of them. They interpret only insofar as they are interpreted as interpreting. (Moore 2012, p. 390)

What underpins and drives Nietzsche's metaphysical act of sense-making, according to Moore, is the will to power, a cosmological principle that he understands, based on Nietzsche's notebooks, as "ceaseless interpreting".<sup>13</sup> Individual sense-makers, too, are themselves "creatures of this cosmological principle's ultimate sense-making". Their individual sense-making is (so to speak) "powered by" this "principle's ultimate sense-making".

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the details of Nietzsche's often-discussed idea of will to power. Before I say something about the psychologically framed reading of will to power, it is worth noting—because it sheds interesting light on Moore's general conception of metaphysics—that the importance of the notebook entry on which Moore relies almost exclusively for his reading has, for quite some time, been questioned by those who established the critical edition of Nietzsche which supplanted the factitious compilation "The Will to Power" by Köselitz and Förster-Nietzsche. Montinari argued that Nietzsche did not include WP 1067 in his "index of usable notes" (2003: 89). In making it the final, culminating aphorism of "The Will to Power"—a work Nietzsche only planned, never actually wrote, and then discarded (needless to say, Moore is aware of this)—Förster-Nietzsche influenced much subsequent Nietzsche interpretation.<sup>14</sup> What interests me here is not so much the status of Nietzsche's *Nachlass* and how we should interpret it in relation to his published writings, but rather a general issue regarding Moore's conception of metaphysics: if there were a decisive case to be made that Nietzsche had discarded this passage, would this put any pressure on Moore's reading? Given Moore's inclusivistic conception of metaphysics, I am not sure it would. Who is to say that a philosopher's most interesting, most novel, most creative, most general attempt to make sense of things needs to be more than point-like—perhaps an aphorism endorsed today and later discarded? As far as I can see, Moore's conception does not rule out what we might call *creative metaphysical pointillism*. Montinari certainly agrees (as do I) that Nietzsche's note, originally published as WP 1067 and now found in the 1885 notebook 38[12], "possesses its own philosophical value," and "should appear in the *Nachlass*" (2003: 90).<sup>15</sup> Why not, then, take it as seriously as Moore does? Why care that it is a note that was later published in the much more guarded, we could say with

Bernard Williams “booby-trapped”, hypothetical argument of *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE 36)?<sup>16</sup> Given Moore’s conception of metaphysics, sense can be made of things, and metaphysics evolves, even if the sense-making metaphysician does not intend it, or did so only at some point. This is merely to highlight the wide net Moore has cast to sustain his image of the evolution of modern metaphysics. But does his attempt to safeguard the continuity of metaphysics against critics like Nietzsche obscure interesting differences in the approaches of those critics?

One of those differences is what I earlier called Nietzsche’s psychological framing. In its proper context in the notebooks, note 38[12] is immediately framed as the kind of problematic, general sense-making that the philosopher-type would make. In 38[13], Nietzsche targets not someone else’s sense-making but, self-referentially, his own attempt of making sense of things. When we look at the entry that follows, Nietzsche uses will to power, as he does in many other passages, not as a cosmological but instead as a psychological principle. It is the desire for power that motivates some types of philosophers to engage in general attempts of making sense of things. In this particular note Nietzsche discusses two different types. The first type (the *past-oriented type* “philosophical labourers”) “gain power over the present or past” by holding fast “previous assignments and creations of value”. The second type he discusses, the *future-oriented*, express and feel their power by being “legislators of valuations” (N 1885, KSA 11, 38[13]). But even these future-oriented philosophers (Nietzsche calls them “real philosophers” because they create rather than perpetuate values they regard as given) “rarely turn out well”. They need to guard themselves against the “headlong fall” into the “abyss” of general rather than perspectival sense-making. The real philosophers (cf. also BGE 2013) might no longer regard values as ahistorically given, but they still mistake what may be good for their type to be good for all, good in general:

the real philosophers command and legislate, they say: this is how it shall be! and it is they who determine the Where to and the What for of man, making use of the spadework done by the philosophical labourers, those subduers of the past [the past-oriented type, M.D.]. This second kind of philosopher [the future-oriented type] rarely turns out well; and indeed their situation and danger is tremendous. How often have they intentionally blindfolded themselves to stop having to see the narrow margin that separates them from

the abyss, the headlong fall: for instance Plato when he persuaded himself that the good, as he wanted it, was not the good of Plato but the good in itself, the eternal treasure that just happened to have been found on his path by some man called Plato! (N 1885, KSA 11, 38[13])

Do we perhaps have good reasons to read this note, 38[13] that immediately follows 38[12], as a note-to-self which shows that Nietzsche is on guard not to “head for the abyss” of taking his sense-making for anything more than the what he clearly took it to be, i.e. framed sense-making, the sense-making of someone who never tired of reminding his readers, as he does in the famous “the way” passage from the *Zarathustra*,

That, however—is my taste:—not good, not bad, but my taste, of which I am no longer shameful nor secretive. “This—it turns out—is my way—where is yours?” — That is how I answered those who asked me “the way.” The way after all—it does not exist. (*ZA III Spirit 2*; 2006: 156)

Nietzsche did try out many ways, first and foremost in his notebooks. For all we know, he decided against publishing his “Metaphysica” in a *magnum opus*. And even if he had published a book, perhaps based on note 38[12], centred around metaphysical or cosmological will-to-power, we should be wary to take his sense-making unframed. We will return to will to power as a psychological hypothesis.

In the next section I want to show that, in his interpretation of nihilism and suffering, Moore also to some extent ignores the psychological Nietzsche and interprets Nietzsche’s sense-making as first-order acts of sense-making.

## 5. NIHILISM CUM SUFFERING

Recall that, according to Moore, Nietzsche’s radical metaphysical vision, which Moore found expressed in “My World Conception” of 1885, 38[12], denies any of the redemptive meanings formerly provided by traditional metaphysics. His metaphysical “act of sense-making” interprets all there is as consisting of nothing but “a mass of interacting forces subject to continual change without unity, identity, or stasis”. Nietzsche’s creative act, in its abnegation of any Leibnizian cost-benefit analyses, Hegelian teloi, or any other sort of redemptions of the transcendent kind

leads to the conviction that there is nothing, nothing at all, but grievous pointless ceaseless change. In a word—in Nietzsche’s word—it leads to nihilism. (EMM, 391)

Change is not just change: in Moore’s reading, it is “pointless” and (importantly for Moore’s interpretation of nihilism) change is “grievous”:

If the suffering had a purpose, we might be able to bear it. But nihilism entails that it has no purpose. It is meaningless suffering. That is what is unbearable. (EMM, 391).

What survives Nietzsche’s act of sense-making—that what there is, and all there is, is cosmological will to power—is very little, almost nothing, except meaningless suffering. And for Moore, suffering without meaning is in turn the essence of nihilism. But is this nihilism really Nietzsche’s act of sense-making? Or is nihilism a concept that he uses to point, not to a general problem, but to a problem specifically aimed at some psychological type or types that Nietzsche addresses? There is plenty of evidence that Nietzsche does *not* conceive of his act of sense-making as grievous and pointless, and that it is so only for some (including at times himself) due to their cognitive and affective commitment to ascetic values. Rather than nihilistic (ceaseless, grievous, pointless change), he actually conceives of “the whole” (das Ganze) as good: “innocent becoming” is his preferred term. Moore actually acknowledges something like this earlier: for Nietzsche, he admits, “the mire of appearances should no longer be thought of [...] as a mire” (EMM, 379–80). However, in his interpretation of nihilism as meaningless suffering, he disregards this. I will first look at suffering and then argue that nihilism is not so much a metaphysical as a psychological condition.

### 5.1 Suffering

With regard to suffering, Nietzsche is much more radical than I believe Moore, who follows Williams (2006), allows. Nietzsche actually rejects the problem of suffering, to borrow Moore’s turn of phrase, not by denying it but by refusing to think in such

terms (cf. EMM 374), i.e. to think of suffering in its traditional sense as something objectionable. This becomes clear in BGE 225, when he rejects substantive ethical theories such as hedonism, eudaemonism, and utilitarianism, as well as pessimism, on the very same basis that they “measure the value of things according to pleasure and pain”, which he claims to be mere “epiphenomena” and “side issues” (*Begleitzustände und Nebensachen*). He turns the common-sense conception of suffering as something objectionable on its head and proposes instead to view it positively, as a “gift” constitutive of human flourishing:

You want, if possible (and no “if possible” is crazier) to abolish suffering. And us? — it looks as though *we* would prefer it to be heightened and made even worse than it has ever been! [...] every enhancement in humanity so far? [...] weren’t these the gifts of suffering (BGE 225).<sup>17</sup>

On what basis does Nietzsche arrive at a new conception of suffering—we could call it innocent suffering, like innocent becoming—that is no longer regarded as intrinsically dis-valuable and problematic, but instead as instrumentally valuable and beneficial?

The suppressed premise that Nietzsche operates in this aphorism (as he does in many of his re-descriptions and arguments) is not the cosmological will to power we discussed in the previous section, but instead a psychological conception of will to power. According to Nietzsche’s psychological hypothesis, power or effectiveness is to be achieved only in encountering and overcoming resistances on the way to some goal. As such it is a good that is constitutively related to resistance and suffering. The psychologist-philosopher Nietzsche views the traditional conception of suffering not unframed—nihilism as a general existential condition—but as the expression of the ascetic type who is unconsciously driven by resentment due to the inability to cope with life’s resistances. Nietzsche’s act of sense-making suggests seeing suffering as a condition of flourishing, not that this makes it any less painful or denies that some suffering may turn out unbearable. In one of his last works, *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, subtitled “*From the Files of a Psychologist*” (NW), Nietzsche explicitly distinguishes asceticist suffering (understood as impoverishment) from those whose suffering results from superabundance. The latter, like the higher types of TI Skirmishes 38 entitled “My concept of freedom”, seek as much of life’s resistances as they possibly can. Thus,



following the admission that he previously made the error of assenting to Wagnerian and Schopenhauerian pessimism, Nietzsche writes in the NW “We Antipodes”:

There are two types of sufferers: first, those who suffer from a superabundance of life—they want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life—then, those who suffer from an impoverishment of life and demand quiet, stillness, calm seas or else intoxication, paroxysm, stupor from art and philosophy. Revenge against life itself — (NCW “We Antipodes”; 2005: 271–2)<sup>18</sup>

Nietzsche’s psychological conception of will to power as “a will to the very activity of overcoming resistances”, to use Reginster’s (2007: 36) influential formulation, is not to be mistaken for a will to a *state* where resistances have been overcome, and control or dominance over others have been achieved. Rather than seeking *achievements*, the psychological Nietzsche’s act of sense-making targets agents who seek *achieving* (Reginster 2012: 41). Past, present and future suffering, when no longer judged by its experientially recalcitrant but by inessential and “epiphenomenal” qualities such as pain and (the absence of) pleasure, are viewed as the resistances not just endured but actively sought by those types capable of seeing suffering as the “gift” constitutive for flourishing.

Nietzsche’s other act of sense-making, *pace* Moore, does not interpret all there is from the point of view of cosmological will to power as suffering from grievous and pointless change. Rather, premised on will to power as a psychological hypothesis, suffering is reconceptualised as the resistances vital for different kinds of flourishing—not for all, not so much by deliberate conscious choice but for those who are capable of making sense of things in this *innocent* way.

This might be the appropriate moment to mention the importance of Nietzsche’s style for interpreting Nietzsche’s sense-making. Often it seems as if Moore regards it—as many of us often do—as somehow inessential to Nietzsche’s sense-making. The psychologist-philosopher achieves his sense-making and makes his sense by allowing others to realize that they are able to make sense of things in similar ways, through his deliberate use of affective style. In EH Nietzsche himself explained that “my art of style” aims to “communicate a state, an inner tension of pathos, with signs, including the tempo of these signs”. His explicit goal, he states, is to target and affect

those “people capable and worthy of a similar pathos” (EH Books 4).<sup>19</sup> With this in mind I would like to return to the problem of nihilism.

## 5.2 *Nihilism*

In GM alone Nietzsche operates with several concepts of nihilism, which (as so often) he does not distinguish properly.<sup>20</sup> He actually acknowledges this and promises to deal with nihilism properly in a future treatise entitled “On the History of European Nihilism”. Nietzsche actually did write a short treatise in 16 sections entitled “European Nihilism”, and in this treatise (chopped up into segments in the canonical edition of the forged “The Will to Power” (Montinari 1994: 90)) emerges not as a general, metaphysical or existential problem for all, but as a problem for certain psychological types who hold specific values. As Nietzsche puts it in “European Nihilism”: “[n]ihilism [i]s a *symptom* of the badly off having lost all consolation [...] The most unhealthy kind of man in Europe (in all classes) is fertile ground for this nihilism [...]” (NF 1886–87, KSA 12, 5[71], my emphasis). My concern is that Moore neglects nihilism as a specific, psychologically framed problem. This becomes clear when he asks what an affirmative attitude towards the world could look like in the face of nihilism:

What is it to affirm the world? It cannot be to give the world some sort of favourable assessment. Nihilism itself already precludes our doing that. (To overcome nihilism is not to refute it.) Nihilism entails that there is no assessing the world, as a whole, without condemning it. This is precisely because of the suffering, which, given that it is not atoned in a superior transcendent reality, is not atoned at all. (EMM 391)

Nihilism, understood as “unatonable” suffering, becomes what we may call the ineluctable existential background condition for Moore’s Nietzsche. As we saw in the previous section, Nietzsche actually arrives at a complex concept of suffering that does not sit well with such a reading of nihilism. If we compare Moore’s claims that I just quoted to Nietzsche’s own analysis in his posthumously published note “Critique of Nihilism” (N 1887–88, KSA 13, 11[99]), it becomes clear that Nietzsche actually

holds that this kind of nihilism, precisely because he regards it not as a general background condition but instead as a problem for specific types, can be overcome. He first offers an explanation of how nihilism, understood as a psychological problem, came about:

Nihilism as a psychological state will have to come about *firstly* when we have sought in everything that happens a “meaning” it doesn’t contain, so that in the end the searcher loses courage. [...] Nihilism as a psychological state comes about *secondly* when a wholeness, a systematisation, even an organisation has been posited within and below everything that happens [...]

Nihilism, Nietzsche argues, arose as a result of assessing the world, as a whole, in terms that turned out to match poorly with our experience of it. While Moore thinks, given his conception of nihilism, that “there is no assessing the world, as a whole, without condemning it”, Nietzsche actually proposes the opposite:

Assuming we have recognised how the world may no longer be interpreted with these three categories [“purpose”, “unity”, “being”] and that upon this recognition the world begins to be without value for us: then we must ask where our belief in these three categories came from—let us see if it isn’t possible to cancel our belief in them. Once we have devaluated these three categories, demonstrating that they can’t be applied to the universe *ceases to be a reason to devaluate the universe*. (N 1887–88, KSA 13, 11[99])

We have some evidence here that Nietzsche’s act of sense-making, *pace* Moore, does *not* hold that we cannot affirm the world by giving it “some sort of favourable assessment”. The *unfavourable* assessment of the whole is the result of employing a set of categories that in his view are not actually applicable, all things considered. But if we managed to give up making sense with these categories (“devaluated these”), then they would “cease to be a reason to devaluate the universe” (N 1887–88, KSA 13, 11[99]). In fact, if we can do so and stop thinking in those terms, Nietzsche thinks, we would give the world a favourable assessment. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what Nietzsche does in the rare moments when he does assess *das Ganze* (“the whole”). In one of his final published pronouncements on this issue, directed against those who devalue (and

keep devaluing) the world with their set of wishful, or perhaps more accurately resentful, categories, he writes:

One belongs to the whole, one only is in the whole, — there is nothing that can judge, measure, compare, or condemn our being, because that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, and condemning the whole . . . But there is nothing outside the whole! — [...] only with this is the innocence of becoming restored ... (TI Errors 8, translation amended)

In the final section of this paper I want to turn briefly to Nietzsche's idea of "eternal return", the culmination of Moore's reading of Nietzsche. Unconvinced by readings of eternal return as a thought experiment, he interprets it as "a feature of the world as it is", the "condition of sense-making". The psychological Nietzsche that I have been defending throughout makes thought experiment readings plausible, and I will attempt to defend one such reading against Moore (and Williams).

## 6. ETERNAL RETURN

In Moore's interpretation, eternal return is "a feature of the world as it is" (EMM, 402). This is not, however, to be misunderstood as a cosmology of infinitely recurring cycles. Rather, eternal return is, for Moore, Nietzsche's attempt to offer a general *condition* of sense-making. Moore, following Bernard Williams, questions readings that take eternal return as "merely a thought-experiment" (EMM, 404; cf. Williams 2006: 319). Before I say more about the latter and, despite Moore's reservations, attempt a thought experiment reading of GS 341, I will briefly present his compelling but in my view ultimately restrictive reading of eternal return. Moore takes eternal return to be Nietzsche's attempt to give a general answer to the question of how one is to face up to the threat of the (in his view) inescapable nihilism we have just discussed. For Moore, the problem of nihilism requires one to (1) "proactively *make* sense of things," (2) "make discriminating *sense*" (i.e. to acknowledge the differences between things), "say 'yes' to some and 'no' to others", and (3) do so by taking account of their *singularity*, "not to interpret, evaluate, and say 'yes' or 'no' to the world as a whole," but to makes sense of "specific episodes, events, relations between forces within the world" (EMM, 392).

If the goal is to “make true sense of things”, then for Nietzsche (as depicted by Moore, who bases his interpretation primarily on its presentation in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), we need to “arrive at a conception of things that will enable one, from one’s point of view of immersion in them, with due honesty, and with due courage, to say ‘Thus I willed it’” (393).<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche’s idea of eternal return is crucial for Moore to “stare down” nihilism. It denotes, roughly, that *each moment* brings together all that is past and all that is future: “Each moment affords its own different perspective on the whole, its own different point of view from which to interpret the whole” (EMM, 403), thereby enabling, “its continual generation of new evaluations and new interpretations” (EMM, 404). As such, eternal return ensures the “continual” staring down—rather than a once and for all overcoming—of “nihilistic meaninglessness” through eternal sense-making. Moore’s reading culminates in his reading of eternal return in the sense that it brings together his reading of will to power (as a cosmological principle of interpretation) and nihilism (as suffering from objective meaninglessness). Moore thus argues (and it is worth quoting this passage at length) that eternal return is

the very condition of sense-making, that ultimate act of the will to power which is manifest in our individual efforts to create value and meaning, whereby each of us is able to affirm the world and thus contribute to the overcoming of nihilism. In its continual generation of new perspectives eternal return allows for the continual generation of new evaluations and new interpretations. Through these, things in the world, including things that are past, can be continually transformed, so that, although they keep returning, they keep returning differently. They can be continually developed, continually lived afresh. That is to say, new sense can be continually made of them. And the horror of their objective meaninglessness can be prevented from destroying us. But the eternity of eternal return is vital. Nihilism can never be overcome once and for all. If ever the process were to cease, it would meet with an unanswerable “so what?”, and nihilism would have a standing invitation, which it would accept, to reassert itself. (EMM, 404)

Moore shows his philosophical acumen in his compelling and, frankly, beautiful interpretation of eternal return. In Moore’s reading, sense is made by each and every one, perhaps not like “bread” (EMM, 6) but more like juice: freshly

squeezed, the past is transformed into a present that, if successful, will revitalise us each moment anew.

We may ask just how plausible it is that eternal return is intended as *the* general condition of sense-making, as a feature of the world as it is? Moore's Nietzsche's bleak metaphysical vision might be bleaker than the spectre of scepticism that Kant had faced, but do we really take Nietzsche offer of what would be effectively a kind of transcendental (this is not Moore's term) condition of sense-making?<sup>22</sup> More importantly, what are we to think of the transition from the nihilistic despair of, say, the asceticist, to affirming her *Dasein* through the continuous generation of new non-nihilistic sense-making? Does Moore's conception actually affect the nihilist's point of view?

On Moore's reading, affecting the nihilist's point of view would require something like "accepting" or assenting to the belief that eternal return is the condition of sense-making, and then following through and engaging in the requisite sense-making. The difficulty inherent in Moore's reading is that, despite his intention of presenting a reading that is *not* "merely a thought experiment," his reading requires the carrying out of just such a thought experiment to be effective. This becomes clear when he asks:

Does this [eternal return] not in fact exacerbate nihilism? For, as Nietzsche himself insists, it [eternal return] presents the nihilistic spectre of meaninglessness in its most extreme and terrifying form, a form in which the meaninglessness recurs and recurs and recurs, *ad infinitum*. (EMM, 404)

But to whom? Admittedly, Moore wants eternal return to denote merely the "form" in which meaninglessness recurs. But can we, in this case, really make sense of Nietzsche's sense-making if severed from those he addresses? Also, in Moore's merely formal (a metaphysician's?) thought experiment, meaninglessness does not actually return *ad infinitum*, at least not when sense-making is indexed, as it has to be, even for Moore, to "individual efforts," or individual points of view. Once this happens, the spectre of meaninglessness does not recur *ad infinitum*. Since Moore's formal reading removes the feature of the return of the entire individual life, and re-centres eternal return on the individual moment, meaninglessness would be finite: it would end when the individual effort ends, with a "finale into nothingness". But isn't such a secret

escape into nothingness precisely one of the variables that Nietzsche's thought experiment sought to exclude? Moore's focal point lies on the meaningful (or meaningless) moment that returns. But Nietzsche's focus, the unit of return, at least in GS 341 but also in ZA, is an entire individual *Dasein*:

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: individual human existence (*Dasein*), as it is, without meaning and goal, but inevitably recurring, *without any finale into nothingness* (N 1886, KSA 12, 5[71], my emphasis).

As is clear from the above passage, excluding the thought of a "finale into nothingness" is indeed a crucial element for Nietzsche. Once Moore's conception is indexed to individual perspectives, from which sense is being made, the nihilistic spectre of meaninglessness—that we saw depends on who it is that is making sense of things—no longer looms *ad infinitum*. Moore's conception allows for the finale into nothingness.

And there may be a second, related problem. Would eternal return, conceived as the condition of sense-making, really address those types that are Nietzsche's main concern: the asceticists, the decadents, the "last humans", the nihilists? Could they not simply claim that they have in fact been making sense of things in accordance with the general "condition of sense-making" all along? Nietzsche is clear that, for example, the Christian is meant to "feel belief in eternal return to be a curse".<sup>23</sup> Not so on Moore's reading. There is little in Moore's formal reading that would prevent these types from simply accepting eternal return, and then continue in their sense-making as before. Given these concerns I would like to take another look at Moore's principal reasons for rejecting thought experiment readings, and see if it can be defended against his (and Williams') concern.

Reading eternal return as a thought experiment or test is particularly pronounced in *Gay Science* 341. Rather than outlining a general condition of how new perspectives and new sense is made of things, Nietzsche—who again calls himself in the preface the "psychologist who knows of few questions that have more traction than the relationship of philosophy and health" (GS Preface 2)—targets those whom he suspects may either be transformed or crushed when invited to imagine what it would be like to live their current lives, past and future actions, the good and the bad, in every little detail, over and over again. The focus of GS 341 is not primarily on new

perspectives in each moment; instead Nietzsche proposes imagining one's entire life such that

there will be *nothing new* in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unspeakably small and great in your life must return to you. (GS 341, *my emphasis*)

What does this thought (experiment) do to you, he asks? Will it crush you, or will it transform you? There is plenty of textual evidence—like the “finale” note I just cited—that eternal return is not primarily intended unframed, as a *formal* feature of the world, but is intended to elicit affective responses, from stomach-churning disgust to divine joy, with the aim of unsettling people's unreflective or naïve relationship with their own lives and values. What the thought experiment of GS 341 aims for is not first and foremost to transform the past and its horrors and suffering into something one “has willed”. Rather, in GS 341, Nietzsche is explicit that the thought experiment is supposed to affect “everything and everyone” (*Allem und Jedem*), that is, all of our actions and engagements, pain *and* joy (*jeder Schmerz und jede Lust*). He writes:

The question about everything and everyone “Do you want this again and innumerable times again?” would, as the greatest heavyweight, lie *on your actions* (würde als das größte Schwergewicht *auf Deinem Handeln* liegen). (GS 341, *my emphasis*)

Nietzsche here presents the thought of eternal return as something that, while it might conceivably crush you, might equally imbue each action (and each decision) with the greatest significance.

Moore (following Williams) has a principal reason why he does not think much of thought experiment readings. In a nutshell, he thinks that one single repetition would do the job for the thought experiment to be successful. If the experimenter could say “yes” to all of the past repeating itself just once, without being overcome by the nausea that the thought may induce, then the essential affirmative step would have been taken. The *return* of the same, rather than the *eternal* return of the same, would have sufficed (cf. Williams 2001 and 2006 and Moore 401n94).



I think that both Williams and Moore are guided in their intuitions on this matter by an assumption that they both share. In keeping with our discussion of Sections 5.1 and 5.2, I will call it the nihilism-cum-suffering assumption. They both think that what gives the thought experiment its primary content is that it requires willing the recurrence of “all the horrors, all the afflictions, and all the misery” (401n94) that characterize existence when we look at it with due honesty. As Williams put it, even after Nietzsche abandoned Schopenhauerian pessimism, “there remained what seemed to Nietzsche, at least, to be a fact that anyone who really understood and held in his mind the horrors of the world would be crushed or choked by them” (Williams 2006: 318). This is precisely the meaningless suffering that is the essential feature of Moore’s conception of nihilism, but we have also seen that it is far from clear that this is actually the best way to interpret Nietzsche’s position. I suspect that the nihilism-cum-suffering assumption is the reason why both Williams and Moore see the thought experiment as primarily concerned with past horrors and objective meaninglessness. They overlook that it contains an important forward-looking, future action-oriented component. GS 341 does not only invite the experimenter to evaluate her past life *in its entirety* from a first-person point of view. The thought experiment is designed to make each and every future action *schwergewichtig*. It is also clear from his use of the term in AC 42 that Nietzsche uses the word *Schwergewicht*, denoting “significance” or “importance”. The future-oriented element of GS 341 entails the thought that whatever you decide to do next—or weaker: end up doing next—you will have to do again, and not just once, ad infinitum: let’s call this the infinity condition. Recall that the infinity condition of the thought experiment is there to exclude any “finale into nothingness”. Conceived in this way, each action is imbued with immense significance, since each future action will contribute to the life *in its entirety*, whose repetition *ad infinitum* the experimenter is asked to imagine. Is it an action that you deem valuable enough to be repeated, and not just once? Does it contribute to the kind of life that, when you think about it right now, you deem worthy of repetition *ad infinitum*, as there won’t be a finale into nothingness?

I agree with Moore and Williams that the *infinity condition* seems to have little purchase from a first-person perspective, unless we assume trans-cyclical identity, which I do not. It is, however, crucial to take the perspective-shifting that the thought experiment invites (from first-person to third-person) seriously. What do I mean by shifting perspective between the first and third person? During the thought

experiment, the experimenter is asked to take a third-person view on the recurring lives of her future self. In the same way as an artist can ask if his work of art will stand the “test of time” and delight future generations, the thought experiment forces the experimenter to question if her future selves will make her proud, and if this life will stand the test of time as a whole composed of individual actions (some yet to come). In the first person, the experimenter couldn’t care less about what happens to her future selves who, in this hypothetical thought experiment, have to repeat her life when she is no longer present: in other words, she will not carry the cost of enduring her actions. In the third person, however, when immersed in the thought experiment, she may care very much. Moore and Williams, guided by the nihilism-cum-suffering assumption, ignore the fact that the thought experiment is about more than “test[ing] your ability not to be overcome by the world’s horror and meaninglessness” (Williams 2006: 318) from the first-person perspective. For the latter, affirming a single repetition may well prove sufficient. They miss the fact that it is designed to be forward-looking from a third-person point of view, making each action *schwerge wichtig* (weighty, significant) when some or all of the following questions are asked: will this life, which I am in the process of living, be affirmed and valued not just by myself, but by the next and countless future generations? Which values will this life express? Which values will it inscribe, *ad infinitum*, into the future history of humanity? From this third-person point of view on my future selves, the thought experiment forces me to return to my own life, here and now. Why are these particular actions, these particular values important to me? What kind of future do they prophesy? I ask myself with due honesty if, what I have done up to now, and what I am about to do, actually express what I value, what others value, and contributes to what I deem to be a valuable life, also third-personally.

Moore and Williams have identified an important point that what is at stake in the thought experiment is “the cost of willing, not the cost of enduring them [the recurrences]” (EMM, 402n94). But the perspectival shift, and the forward-looking aspect of eternal return, is crucial. Conceiving of my actions in the third person, asking if I can wholeheartedly affirm the recurrence of my next action, if it becomes part of an entire life that would express and inscribe, *ad infinitum*, a set of values into the future of humanity—this increases the significance of future actions, at least for this experimenter. And as such, pace Moore and Williams, the infinity condition increases the cost of willing their recurrence.

Much more would need to be said to defend this reading of eternal return. There is also the more general issue that philosophical thought experiments tend to run out of steam and usually lose their “intuition-pumping” force at some point. Once I ask myself if it even makes sense to think of a life that could stand the test of infinity, I might smile at the megalomania contained in the thought. But then, Nietzsche’s image might haunt me enough to cause me to ask again what I take to constitute a life worth living (the first person perspective), or a life worth respecting or remembering (the third person perspective). Even if I believe, as Nietzsche did, in the created-ness and the finitude of values—values just like the humans he thinks come into being, live, and fade away—I can still think of a life *par excellence* along the lines of great civilizations, great works of art, and great individuals, some of which, I know, remain valuable even if their values are no longer “alive” in us but exist only as reminders of the possible variety of the relational, rather than absolute, goodness of lives, that we may or may not be able to compare and weigh against one another.

What kind of actions, what kinds of life would pass this test? This is only one question to ask. Another is (for the philosopher-psychologist): Who could be tempted to conceive of acting and living in such a way? When we look at Nietzsche’s heroes, it is plausible that Nietzsche the philosopher-psychologist—who operated with assumptions that he thought were more realistic than the assumptions of those he called the “old” psychologists—was trying to push humanity beyond itself, hoping that some might be sensitive to his making sense of things, and then make their own sense accordingly. If each action, each decision became maximally challenging (*a maximal resistance*), might this perhaps motivate certain kinds of people, who feel that they have the powers it takes, to start making sense of things differently?

One of the strengths of Nietzsche’s image is that it can be read unframed, as a general condition of sense-making. Moore has done this masterfully, and the reading I have outlined should not be seen as an attempt to refute Moore’s. Nietzsche, the philosopher-psychologist, deliberately uses tropes that not only allow, but are meant to provoke, different intuitions from and for different points of view.

## 7. CONCLUSION

All I have been able to do is scratch the surface of Moore’s rich and extremely rewarding reading of Nietzsche as a metaphysician in his sense. As I have argued,

however, Moore largely ignores Nietzsche the philosopher-psychologist who, rather than engaging in first-order, general acts of sense-making from his own perspective, views the sense-making of himself and others as expressions of psychological perspectives of types. The metaphysician, as we saw, is one of Nietzsche's prime targets. Was Moore right to include Nietzsche in his *Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*? His attempt to safeguard metaphysics against its deniers should not obscure the fact that Nietzsche approaches the most general attempts at making sense of things, including his own, in ways other than those identified by Moore, and often practices a very different, in my words psychologically framed form of sense-making. Will to power more often than not is used as a psychological rather than a cosmological hypothesis; likewise, nihilism is often better understood as a psychological problem of specific types rather than a general claim that what-there-is is the objective horror of man's existential situation. I have tried to show that Nietzsche, in his sense-making, tries to refuse to think with the traditional concept of suffering.

Finally, I have argued that Moore's eternal return, which he interprets as the general condition of all sense-making, builds on his specific readings of will to power and nihilism as suffering. I defended a thought experiment reading that fits better with the concerns of the philosopher-psychologist and addresses Moore's and Williams' main philosophical concern. Needless to say, more work is required to show that eternal return is Nietzsche's targeted challenge to those whose (psychological) will to power is still very much alive (despite resentment-driven attempts of the ascetic ideal to brandish power as evil), and designed to motivate them to accept that challenge.

One express goal of Moore's conception of metaphysics is to deny the impossibility of metaphysics. This he achieves masterfully by showing that many of those who overtly deny metaphysics actually engage in their own, general attempts to make sense of things. In the absence of clearer criteria, however, of what counts as such sense-making, and what in turn might count as challenging such sense-making, this may not only be a merit of Moore's conception.

Nietzsche once entertained the thought that what may be needful was actually a kind of sense-making that was much more local than general. He asks, in his purposely affective style, why it is that human beings cannot content themselves with much more immediate, much more local sense-making:

opposed to the value of the that which eternally stays the same [...] the value of the shortest and impermanent, the seductive golden flashes on the body of the snake vita — / gegen den Werth des Ewig-Gleichbleibenden [...] der Werth des Kürzesten und Vergänglichsten, das verführerische Goldaufblitzen am Bauch der Schlange vita — (N 1887, KSA 12, 9[26])

Making sense of what is “shortest” and “impermanent”, seeing ephemeral perfections that cannot and must not last as supremely valuable, is perhaps a candidate of sense-making *par excellence* for Nietzsche, sense-making that may—or may not—fall through the wide and rewarding net that Moore has cast for the future of metaphysics.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The German texts of Nietzsche referred to in this article are:

KSA *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke*. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 vols, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and Walter de Gruyter, 1988.

KSB *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Briefe*. Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 vols, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and Walter de Gruyter, 1986.

The following abbreviations are used for writings by Nietzsche:

PTAG *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

GS *The Gay Science*

ZA *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*

GM *The Genealogy of Morality*

EH *Ecce Homo*

TI *Twilight of Idols: How to Philosophize with a Hammer*

AC *The Anti-Christ*

NW *Nietzsche contra Wagner. From the Files of a Psychologist*

I cite Nietzsche’s works using these standard acronyms for his works, followed by a

Roman numeral for a part or chapter (if any), with separately numbered sections, e.g. GM I 1, or BGE 19, or EH III Z.1.

For Nietzsche's *Nachlass* (N), the posthumously published notebooks, I cite, often with amendments, *Nietzsche, Writings from the Early Notebooks*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, trans. L. Löb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 (WEN) followed by page numbers; and *Nietzsche, Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. K. Sturge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 (WLN) followed by page numbers. I further provide the year, KSA volume number, followed by notebook number, and in square brackets the note number, e.g. N 1883–4, KSA 10, 24[10]. Only in cases when a note is not translated in WEN or WLN, I cite “The Will to Power” (WP), a selection made by later editors and not by Nietzsche, trans. W. Kauffmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> If Moore's evolution of modern metaphysics had included a chapter on the Early German Romantics such as Novalis, Schlegel, and Hölderlin, he may have brought forward the start date of this paradigm of difference.

<sup>3</sup> I myself argued in Dries 2007 and 2008 that Nietzsche's position can be interpreted as the culmination of a development in modern metaphysics that gradually replaces any staticist conception of reality (to which Nietzsche usually refers in short-hand with the term “Being”) with a dynamic conception that is best conceived as processual (in Nietzsche's terminology: “becoming”). But I argued that Nietzsche, rather than prioritizing difference, gestures to what I called an “adualistic” conception that tries to conceive of reality as both becoming and being, *and* neither exclusively as becoming nor exclusively as being. In this work I also largely ignored the psychological Nietzsche, but I already conceived of Nietzsche's metaphysical position as targeting sense-making, which he regards as problematic: “when [Nietzsche] addresses the adherents of the paradigm of being he presents a radical doctrine of becoming in hyperbolic terms; on the other hand, his process ontology (hypothetical or not) of will to power turns out to be much less radical, allowing for stability and duration. But this schematic separation of standards obfuscates the real problem, namely that Nietzsche tries to do both at the same time: shock the believers in being out of their nihilistic assumption and prepare for a non-nihilistic, new paradigm” (2008: 134).



<sup>4</sup> This is the title of an essay by Schopenhauer, who is unfortunately almost entirely absent from Moore's narrative.

<sup>5</sup> Why does Nietzsche regard this need for most general sense-making as pathological? Metaphysical sense-making developed out of the need to cope with the problems of uncertainty, contingency, and absurdity, but it ends up making things worse: the metaphysico-moral metaphysical sense-making inculcated a deep-seated, life-denying affective nihilism (cf. Gemes) that made "the sick animal" even "sicker", and ultimately results in a special kind of despair and disorientation (Register) when the palliative sense-making is finally seen through as fabricated. In one Nachlass passage, Nietzsche argues that the conditions humanity finds itself in have now changed such that the need for extreme, general sense-making may no longer be necessary: "In our Europe, life is no longer quite so uncertain, contingent, nonsensical. [. . .] The *power* man has achieved now allows a *reduction* of those means of discipline of which the moral interpretation was the strongest." (N 1886–87, KSA 12, 5[71])

<sup>6</sup> That Nietzsche is opposed to reductive naturalistic explanation becomes clear from BGE 12: "Between you and me, there is absolutely no need to give up 'the soul' itself, and relinquish one of the oldest and most venerable hypotheses—as often happens with naturalists: given their clumsiness, they barely need to touch 'the soul' to lose it." See also Peter Kail (2015: 22ff.)

<sup>7</sup> This has been the focus of much recent research. For some recent discussions on Nietzsche's conception of drives, see for example Richardson 1996, 2004, 2008, and 2013, Leiter 2015, Reginster 2006 and 2007, Gardner 2007, Janaway 2007 and 2012, Gemes and May 2009, Pippin 2010, Dries 2015, Dries and Kail 2015, and Katsafanas 2013 and 2016. For one of the most sustained attempts to provide a philosophical account of Nietzsche's "metapsychology" in light of contemporary philosophy of mind and neuropsychology, see Welshon 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Moore takes two claims about Nietzsche as central: (1) that Nietzsche is still engaged in "trying to make maximally general sense of things" (EMM, 378), and (2) that all sense-making "really is sense-making. Sense is created not discovered" (EMM, 379). Both claims are considerably weakened when we take the psychological Nietzsche seriously. The second claim, that sense is always made and not discovered, obscures the fact that the psychological Nietzsche does indeed also take himself to *discover* the

many different senses that have been made of things. — I take Nietzsche’s “framing” to be different from what Bernard Williams has called Nietzsche’s textual “booby traps” (1993: 4). *Booby-trapping* in Williams’ sense is primarily negative, meant to prevent extracting philosophical theory from Nietzsche’s texts. As a useful commentary on this issue, see Pippin (2010, xv, 2–6).

<sup>9</sup> This is not a philosophical position that Moore ultimately endorses. In earlier work, he has argued for the view, in part directed against Nietzsche, that “there can be sense-making that is not from any point of view” (EMM, 379n19). I cannot engage here with Moore’s *Points of View* (1997). Suffice to say that in his 2012 treatment Moore accepts Nietzsche’s perspectivism, but he treats concepts such as will to power, nihilism, and eternal return as perspectival only in the sense that these are Nietzsche’s “acts of sense-making”. What he does not do is locate them within the psychological Nietzsche’s wider project.

<sup>10</sup> “Nun sind philosophische Systeme nur für ihre Gründer ganz wahr [...] ich will nur den Punkt aus jedem System herausheben, der ein Stück Persönlichkeit ist [...] die Aufgabe ist das an’s Licht zu bringen, was wir immer lieben und verehren müssen und was uns durch keine spätere Erkenntniß geraubt werden kann: der große Mensch.” (PTZG Einleitung)

<sup>11</sup> “On the *psychology of metaphysics*. The influence of *timidity*. — That which has been *feared* the most, the cause of the *most powerful suffering* (addiction to rule [*Herrschaft*], lust [*Wollust*], etc.), has been treated by men with the greatest amount of hostility and eliminated from the ‘true’ world. Thus they have *eliminated* the affects one by one — posited God as the antithesis of evil, i.e., placed reality *in the negation of the desires and affects* (i.e., in *nothingness*). / In the same way, they have hated the irrational, the arbitrary, the accidental (as the causes of immeasurable phy<sical> suffering). *As a consequence*, they negated this element in being-in-itself and conceived it as absolute ‘rationality’ and ‘purposiveness.’ / In the same way, they have feared change, transitoriness: this expresses a straitened soul, full of mistrust and evil experiences (the case of Spinoza: an opposite kind of man would account change a *stimulus*). / A creature overloaded and *playing* with force would call precisely the *affects, irrationality*, and *change* good in a eudemonistic sense, together with their consequences: danger, contrast, perishing, etc.”

<sup>12</sup> The bad metaphysics that needs revising is the act of making sense of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic ideal, a metaphysics that precisely prioritizes identity over difference, being over becoming and aspires, as Moore writes, “to climb up beyond the mire of appearances to a place where there is unique access to what is ultimately real, to what is ultimately good, and to what is ultimately true; a place where he can embrace all that is higher in lieu of all that is base” (EMM, 376). All such attempts to make sense of things belonged to the ascetic ideal’s so-called “will to truth”. That is, it not simply “desires” truth but is committed to “valuing truth above all else [...] an abhorrence of all deception, even where deception seems best attuned to the demands of life” (EMM, 377). While Nietzsche is opposed to the metaphysics timidly carried out by “the asceticist”, this is how the argument must go; he is not opposed to better metaphysics in Moore’s sense.

<sup>13</sup> Moore does not draw out in any detail what he takes to be the implications of Nietzsche’s metaphysics. For a different attempt to spell out some of the main component claims of Nietzsche’s metaphysics, see Galen Strawson’s recent paper, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics?” (Strawson 2015). Strawson does not share Moore’s conception of metaphysics but he, too, sees Nietzsche engaged in unframed metaphysical sense-making (Moore) or claims (Strawson).

<sup>14</sup> And since an English translation of the critical edition of Nietzsche is still outstanding, and we still rely on the Kauffmann translation of “The Will to Power”, its influence continues.

<sup>15</sup> On the will to power, see in particular Clark 1990, Richardson 1996 and 2004, and Leiter 2002/2015; also Montinari 2003, Reginster 2007, Dries 2013 and 2015, and Katsafanas 2013 and 2016.

<sup>16</sup> For a recent reading of BGE 36 that, if correct, would partially vindicate Moore’s reading, see Loeb (2015). Loeb reads BGE neither as “booby-trapped” nor as any direct presentation of the cosmological will to power. Instead he proposes—taking seriously what I call Nietzsche’s technique of psychological framing—to read BGE 36 as “an imaginative strategy wherein human beings can gain a partial vision of will to power in its full strength [...] but only as a heuristic and counterfactual thought experiment that grants us a purely explanatory and analogical perspective on the radically deanthropomorphic features of cosmological will to power” (Loeb 2015, 84).

<sup>17</sup> See also N 1887, KSA 12, 8[2], another late note entitled “On the psychology of metaphysics”: “Die Präokkupation durch das Leiden bei den Metaphysikern: ist ganz naiv. „Ewige Seligkeit“: psychologischer Unsinn. Tapfere und schöpferische Menschen fassen Lust und Leid nie als letzte Werthfragen, — es sind Begleit-Zustände, man muß Beides wollen, wenn man etwas erreichen will. — Darin drückt sich etwas Müdes und Krankes an den Metaphysikern und Religiösen aus, daß sie Lust- und Leidprobleme im Vordergrunde sehen. Auch die Moral hat nur deshalb für sie solche Wichtigkeit, weil sie als wesentliche Bedingung in Hinsicht auf Abschaffung des Leidens gilt.”

<sup>18</sup> The terms “Dionysian art” and “tragic outlook and insight” require some unpacking to avoid misunderstanding Nietzsche’s unconventional usage. In TI, he clarifies that the tragic artist is no longer pessimistic (unlike the ascetic Christian) because he seeks and values by “say[ing] Yes especially to that which is questionable and terrible, he is Dionysian ...” (TI Reason 6). In the same text Nietzsche makes it clear that he understands “tragic feeling” in opposition to Aristotle and his former philosophical and cultural allies Schopenhauer and Wagner. Explicitly drawing an analogy with “orgiastic psychology”, he likens the tragic feeling with orgiastic “excess in feeling of vitality and force” (*überströmendes Lebens- und Kraftgefühls*) (TI Ancient 5). Thus, in the passage quoted from NW, the superabundance sufferer who seeks “Dionysian art and tragic insight and outlook” no longer conceives of suffering in the traditional sense when she immerses herself maximally in life’s resistance relationships. Instead she experiences it—“beyond terror and compassion” (TI Ancient 5)—as “being oneself the eternal joy of becoming” (*die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein*).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. also ZA II, “On redemption”. At the end of the conversation, the hunchback enquires why Zarathustra speaks differently to different audiences. Zarathustra responds that different types, presumably because they usually listen only from their own perspectives, may be spoken to differently. Nietzsche does not think that we are somehow epistemically confined only to one perspective. GM III 12 makes it clear that his conception of objectivity requires taking different affective perspectives (for a discussion of GM III 12, see Dries 2015a: 119–120).

<sup>20</sup> In GM, first, there is “suicidal nihilism”, roughly defined as early humanity’s (those who are not nobles or masters) suffering from high degrees of uncertainty and the

constant fear of death. In the underdeveloped GM account, suicidal nihilism is then addressed through a *Kunstgriff* (“artifice”) of the ascetic ideal: it offers values that gave this highly uncertain life meaning by offering a life-preserving “cure” to the suicidal nihilist, thereby preventing the ultimate act of life-denial: suicide. But the ascetic ideal, despite being life-preserving from the suicidal nihilist’s perspective, is itself deemed nihilistic in both its cognitive and affective denial and devaluation of natural, worldly existence (on affective nihilism as the Christian’s “will to nothingness”, a drive to repress all natural drives, see Gemes and Sykes 2013). When the asceticists’ life-denying values have run their course, as Nietzsche thinks they have or soon will, they “devalue themselves” (N 1887, KSA 12, [9]35), e.g. through valuing truth absolutely the asceticist comes to realize that absolute truth does not exist. At this point we reach what Reginster has usefully termed two other types of nihilism: a nihilism of despair, which afflicts those who now regard their earlier highest values as unrealizable, and a nihilism of disorientation, which afflicts those who suffer from the disorientation over the loss of their values that can no longer guide them.

<sup>21</sup> Moore’s reading is committed to two further claims that (1) everything is knotted together (which entails that each thing implicates every other thing, and the affirmation of each entails the affirmation of all); and (2) that change is ceaseless (EMM, 402).

<sup>22</sup> This strikes me as odd, given the extreme opposition that Moore acknowledges between Nietzsche and Kant: “If anyone is Nietzsche’s principal target, Kant is” (EMM, 375). Moore interprets Nietzsche as asking the general question of “what making sense of things even *is*” (EMM, 375), whereas I have tried to show that the philosopher-psychologist more often than not asks: “Who is it, making this or that sense of things, and why?”

<sup>23</sup> There is further evidence in the notebooks that Nietzsche thinks of eternal return as an experimental worldview that functions as a test (*Probe*) for different types. For example, in a notebook entry written well after GS and ZA, Nietzsche explains that he arrived at eternal return (“die übermüthigste lebendigste und weltbejahendste aller möglichen Denkweisen”) in his attempt to “think the mechanistic world conception to its very conclusion” (“ich fand sie im Zuendedenken der mechanistischen Weltbetrachtung”) (N 1885, KSA 11, 34[204]). In an earlier note, when he discusses

the latter, he urges not to take it as “the *demonstrated* worldview” but as one that “necessitates the greatest demandingness and discipline,” as “a test (*Probe*) for physical and psychological flourishing” (N 1885, KSA 11, 34[76]).