

Chapter Ten

Being Unattached

Freedom and Nietzsche's Free Spirits¹

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Unsurprisingly, one finds multiple senses of freedom associated with the *freedom* of the free spirit in Nietzsche's texts. Nietzsche attributes both positive and negative senses of freedom to the free spirits in his works. That is, when describing how free spirits are *free*, Nietzsche sometimes characterizes this as *freedom to* do something (positive), and sometimes as *freedom from* certain kinds of constraints (negative). This chapter surveys a few of these senses and suggests how they add dimensions to Nietzsche's broader views about freedom and agency. One, in particular, revolves around the nature of the lack of attachment [Unabhängigkeit] that characterizes free spirits. As Nietzsche appears to develop the idea, being unattached is not simply being *free from* others. It is not a matter of being radically unbound. Ideally, it includes being *enabled* in a certain way, that is, to be *free to* form significant relations with others. Put another way, the kind of relative lack of attachment that Nietzsche links with free spirits allows one to maximize attachments. Again, this sense is not the only one Nietzsche associates with the kind of freedom free spirits enjoy, but it is an important one and somewhat neglected in the current literature on Nietzsche. Developing this idea, we can see that an available strand of Nietzsche's thinking includes a vision of free spirits as more than rugged individuals or members of an exclusive community of likeminded fellows. Nietzsche's ideal—if it is appropriate to refer to the notion in such terms—entails a certain capacity that he thinks is psychically and socially enabling. Thus, this sense of freedom is critically important in his positive philosophy.

I. WHAT ARE FREE SPIRITS *FREE FROM*?—NEGATIVE FREEDOM

One of the most obvious senses of freedom of the free spirit—which is perhaps the one that at least some people think of as the primary (or even exclusive) sense in which free spirits are free—is cast in terms of being *free from* certain claims of society, particularly those regarded as customary and binding (e.g., HH 225, 230; D 9, 29). As Nietzsche begins to develop the notion of the free spirit in those works designated as part of a series on the free spirit, he carefully works through how customs claim—as well as make possible—individuals (e.g., HH 261). This binding force is exploited by morality, which has a variety of tactics for shaping and molding both the psychic and physical forms of human existence (cf. HH 231). In this respect, morality makes a particular kind of common life possible while it establishes terms for distinction that make one recognizable as an individual, either through exceptional realization of the positively esteemed way of life or by virtue of one standing out from it.

At times, the freedom of the free spirit appears to be at least partially constituted by his or her ability to loosen, if not escape, these bonds. (From the start, I would like to point out that free spirits need not be actual persons or even a type of person. It is also possible to conceive them as spiritual forms that can be realized at various times and to various degrees, a point I shall emphasize and elaborate later in the chapter.) Nietzsche sometimes talks about this feature as a step, sometimes as an initial or at least early stage in a developmental process of becoming a free spirit,² and later he designates some as free, very free spirits. Free spirits are contrasted in Nietzsche's texts and in the scholarly literature with various kinds of so-called fettered spirits (e.g., HH 226–228).³ The free spirits are envisioned by Nietzsche as not *bound* to the morality of custom, convention, superstition, or even morality itself and the habits of thinking (or not thinking) and valuing that characterize such views. Free spirits are, minimally, free of *this*. In short, they have a certain kind of independence that fettered spirits lack.

One form of such independence that Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes is independence or freedom from association: solitude, being able to withstand a lack of human companionship. Time and again, solitude is described in a sense that suggests that at least one of the ways Nietzsche conceives it is in terms of being free *from* the demands of others, being free from obligations, associations, and their influences. So, it would seem that we have in this notion yet another negative sense of freedom.⁴

This is particularly evident in *Beyond Good and Evil* in the final section of part 2, titled “The Free Spirit [Der Freie Geist]”:

At home, or at least having been guests, in many countries of the spirit; having escaped again and again from the musty agreeable nooks into which prefer-

ence and prejudice, youth, origin, the accidents of people and books or even exhaustion from wandering seemed to have banished us; full of malice against the lures of dependence that lie hidden in honors, or money, or offices, or enthusiasms of the senses; . . . we are born, sworn, jealous friends of *solitude*, of our own most profound, most midnightly, most middaily solitude: that is the type of man we are, we free spirits! (BGE 44)

And further, in *GMI* 7, where Nietzsche writes:

Every philosopher would speak as Buddha did when he was told of the birth of a son: “Rahula has been born to me, a fetter has been forged for me” (Rahula here means “a little demon”); every “free spirit” would experience a thoughtful moment, supposing he had previously experienced a thoughtless one, of the kind that once came to the same Buddha—“narrow and oppressive,” he thought to himself, “is life in a house, a place of impurity; freedom lies in leaving the house”: “thinking thus, he left the house.”⁵

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

If we look at how Nietzsche compares and contrasts free spirits with fettered ones, as Bernard Reginster does in his article on Nietzsche and fanaticism,⁶ then we see that the free spirits are also free from a certain kind of relationship to truth. To be sure, they care very much about the truth, and this motivates what they question and how. But they have a somewhat different relation to truth. This suggests, if the analysis holds, that free spirits are free in ways that might differ from their free-thinking Enlightenment counterparts. For they, too, certainly prized truth and also might be thought to value “thinking for oneself” in ways that, on the face of it, would appear congenial to Nietzsche’s views, but Nietzsche is quite clear that his free spirits are distinctive. We see this very clearly in BGE 25, where Nietzsche points to Bruno, and by implication to Nietzsche’s own contemporary free thinkers who idealize him as their forefather.

The example is puzzling and instructive. Bruno (1548–1600) is the sort of figure who we might imagine would have appealed to Nietzsche. Bruno was martyred for his support of the ideas of Copernicus. He was shunned from nearly every academic community on account of his opposition to Aristotle; he advanced the view that the world was eternal and ever changing, and he anticipated a theory of relativity in his arguments against Aristotle’s notions of opposites: “There is no absolute up or down, as Aristotle taught; no absolute position in space; but the position of a body is relative to that of other bodies. Everywhere there is incessant relative change in position throughout

the universe, and the observer is always at the center of things.”⁷ In a play he wrote, which evokes themes of satyr plays, Bruno features the “ass of Cyl-lene,” which skewers superstition. The “ass” is everywhere, not only in the church at the time of the ass festival (and at other times) but also in all other public institutions, including the courts and the schools.⁸ Bruno was a skeptic, particularly about theological matters where scientific reasoning offered evidence that contradicts matters of faith, and he was an advocate of free thought.

Bruno achieves freedom *from* many things, even at a great cost, and he would be a good model for a free spirit. Indeed, he was—but *not* the sort that Nietzsche appears to advocate. Bruno was an icon for the “free thinkers” [Freiedenken] movement, with which Nietzsche explicitly contrasts his free spirits in BGE 44.⁹ At least part of Nietzsche’s opposition to his contemporary free thinkers, particularly those who take Bruno as an icon, focuses on the fact that martyrs to truth evince a kind of unconditionality that ultimately imprisons, fetters—perhaps with even more grave consequences than those who otherwise shirk Enlightenment ideals. Truth at any price—even when used to oppose superstition and the Christianized worldview—might be thought to replace one god with another. It seems clear that Nietzsche thinks his own free spirits are also free from this, or they at least strive to be such—they are oriented toward a kind of *freedom from unconditionality*, including—perhaps especially—with respect to their valuation of truth.

There are two features of this idea of freedom-from-unconditionality that I wish to underscore in characterizing the freedom of the free spirit. Negatively, the free spirit is detached from a particular commitment to truth—in advance of and even in the face of some reasons to believe otherwise. The free spirit is free from *compromising* commitment. But there is still more to be done in order to clarify just what it is that might be compromised in the absence of such independence, something to which I return below when examining some of the positive senses in which free spirits are free. In addition to being free from such commitment, Nietzsche’s free spirit is free from a certain kind of accompanying feeling—namely, one linked with a need to produce the feeling of power in this unusual way, even to the point of extinction as those who are martyred for it. Reginster argues for this view: figures Nietzsche regards as fettered spirits (particularly the so-called free spirits Nietzsche anticipates replacing) draw a sense of their own power from their subjection to the immensely binding force of unconditional commitment. By tying themselves to the unconditional valuation of truth, they gather a sense of themselves as joining or being a part of such manifestations of power. Yet another characterization of a negative sense of freedom for the free spirits is that they are *free from* this particular need, to produce the feeling of power (which Nietzsche thinks all beings seek) in this particular way (compare HH 635 and D 542).

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

II. POSITIVE SENSES OF FREEDOM FOR FREE SPIRITS

In the discussion of negative freedom of free spirits, I underscored their independence, a feature Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes, and I explored some of the things in relation to which the free spirit is independent. I now wish to look more closely at a key passage in which Nietzsche describes this feature of free spirits to inquire precisely about just what it is from which the free spirits are free. Looking for this source negatively also provides some clues about the positive sense. Here too, Nietzsche's conception of independence gains some complexity and subtlety that require more reflection than what is sometimes found in the secondary literature. The passage is BGE 41, still in part 2, "The Free Spirit," where Nietzsche writes:

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

There are many questions that arise here, but I want to focus on the term translated as "independence": *Unabhängigkeit*.¹⁰ Literally, this is a state or condition of being unattached. But simply *unattached* might suggest something a bit too casual. I think a stronger translation in the English is warranted, and this stronger sense facilitates a somewhat different understanding

of the *kind* of independence Nietzsche is talking about here. Auf Deutsch, Abhängigkeit is the term used for dependence so it is clear how Unabhängigkeit yields an appropriate translation as ‘independence.’ The ‘un’ negates the ‘dependence’. Unabhängigkeit is a negative condition: to be *not* in a state of dependence. While Abhängigkeit can be used to talk about dependence in a positive sense of cooperation, is it also used to describe another specific kind of dependence that was becoming an object of increasingly intense scrutiny both culturally and biologically in Nietzsche’s day, namely, the kind of dependence found in contexts of *addiction*. I think a stronger sense akin (if not a direct reference) to the connotations associated with the immensely powerful pull that addiction commands is appropriate to the context of Nietzsche’s concern. The fettered spirits are addicted to what binds them.

In BGE, Nietzsche links independence, when attempted by those who are unprepared for it, with the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, a theme that is echoed at the end of the book.¹¹ In BGE 29, Nietzsche writes:

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

The German in this case is “Unabhängig zu sein,” to be unattached. And this passage is also related to the earlier concern about solitude, only here Nietzsche underscores just how difficult it can be to tolerate such detachment. Clearly, he has in mind something more extreme than simply nonreliance or lack of cooperation in using this term. This condition is dissociative, but it is dissociative from a state of reliance or addiction on substances that themselves induce states of dissociation. Furthermore, insofar as the root “abhang” means hang below, “unabhang” could playfully suggest a certain sort of defiance of gravity. This is an image invoked by Nietzsche in his emphasis on dancing as well as flying like a bird as in “The Songs of Prince Vogelfrei,” the appendix to *The Gay Science*, and it is at the core of Nietzsche’s therapy for combatting what he calls “the spirit of gravity” in GS (especially sections 380 and 382) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as mentioned below.¹² All told, independence, for Nietzsche, appears to be much more complex and potentially more significant than it might appear at first glance.

Nietzsche provides greater focus and specificity about his intended meaning when he returns to some related ideas later in the final section (44) of

“The Free Spirit” in BGE. In this case, Nietzsche associates free, *very free* spirits with the philosophers of the future. That is, it would appear that the philosophers of the future are free spirits, but not all free spirits are philosophers of the future. Put another way, philosophers of the future partake of a kind of free spirituality, a kind that differs from the religious existence he describes in the part that follows “The Free Spirit.”

In the section linking free spirituality with the philosophers of the future, Nietzsche directly states that he wants to be as clear as possible about the nature of the free spirits so as to avoid misunderstanding and confusing them with other varieties of free spirit advocated by those free thinkers [Freidenker] and the like, mentioned above, those whom Nietzsche describes as “*levelers*”; they are:

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

By contrast, those whom Nietzsche sees as truly *free* regard that which opposes the goals of the free thinker [Freidenker], the opposite conditions of security, safety, comfort, and ease, as conditions for growth, even flourishing: “prolonged pressure and constraint” facilitate growth, development, and the gathering of strength and vigor. Famously—and *infamously*—Nietzsche claims certain forms of *unfreedom* condition the opposite spirit: “We think that hardness, forcefulness, slavery, danger in the alley and the heart, life in hiding, stoicism, the art of experiment and devilry of every kind, that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents serves the enhancement of the species ‘man’ as much as its opposite does” (BGE 44). I will suggest below how we can see this as potentially contributing to the positive sense of freedom Nietzsche’s free spirits realize and how this is related to what the free spirits are ultimately, *possibly*, able to do, but before I get to that point, I wish to take notice of a few things.

Nietzsche is *not* saying that “hardness, forcefulness, slavery,” and the like are *more* life-enhancing than their opposite—rather, he claims they are enhancing *at least as much* as their opposites. This is to some extent an acknowledgment and

justification (in the sense of recognition of what Nietzsche elsewhere affirms as the *innocence of becoming*) of the fullness of life, an affirmation or love of all that is, rather than just the particular aspects we especially esteem or to which we aspire at any particular moment. This, I suggest later on in the chapter, is an important affective orientation for the free spirit to take. It will play a crucial role in making it possible for Nietzsche's free spirits' detachment to not ultimately undermine them.¹³

Returning to the matter of how unfreedom, more specifically, might be necessary for or potentially in the service of freedom, we should certainly try to gain greater clarity about the matter of *whose unfreedom* serves freedom and in what respect.¹⁴ A possible interpretation, one not unfamiliar in the critical literature on Nietzsche and not without justification, is that Nietzsche might regard it as necessary for *some* to be unfree in order for *others* to be free. In such a case, the unfree are sacrificed for the benefit or advantage of the freedom of those (presumably few) others who will reap the greatest benefits of the forced labor and limited opportunities of those who are enslaved. Others are simply the means to serve the end of the production of rare type who achieves unprecedented freedom. There are a good number of other passages where Nietzsche makes reference to conditions of servitude and subjection of this sort, supporting an interpretation of just this sort (e.g., philosophers are described as exercising a "selective and cultivating influence" placing others "under their spell" [BGE 61]), so I am not categorically denying that such features are apparent in Nietzsche's complicated views on freedom. But it is also the case that part of what Nietzsche seems to think is that *unfreedom conditions a certain kind of freedom* in the very same individuals—it is somehow important that those who would be free, perhaps especially those who would be very free, must somehow first (or perhaps in some respects simultaneously) be unfree, that, minimally, as suggested in BGE 29, cited above, they have an *inner constraint*. To round off discussion of this dimension of Nietzsche's views, I wish to focus on precisely this relation between freedom and unfreedom, which will bring us back to further exploration of what constitutes dependence [Abhängigkeit], of the sort from which the free spirits are free. Section 41 of BGE continues and concludes with the following:

Not to remain stuck to a person—not even the most loved—every person is a prison, also a nook. Not to remain stuck to a fatherland—not even when it suffers most and needs help most—it is less difficult to sever one's heart from a victorious fatherland. Not to remain stuck to some pity—not even for higher men into whose rare torture and helplessness some accident allowed us to look. Not to remain stuck to a science—even if it should lure us with the most precious finds that seem to have been saved up precisely for us. Not to remain stuck to one's own detachment, to that voluptuous remoteness and strangeness of the bird who flees ever higher to see ever more below him—the danger of

the flier. Not to remain stuck to our own virtues and become as a whole the victim of some detail in us, such as our hospitality, which is the danger of dangers for superior and rich souls who spend themselves lavishly, almost indifferently, and exaggerate the virtue of generosity into a vice. One must know how *to conserve oneself*: the hardest test of independence.

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

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

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

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

grateful even to need and vacillating sickness because they always rid us from some rule and its “prejudice,” grateful to god, devil, sheep, and worm in us.

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

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

Free spirits are not simply negatively free; they do not lack forms of attachment. Rather, the key point is that *they avoid remaining stuck* to such bonds—even, as Nietzsche writes, *to their notion of themselves as being detached*. So, it is critically important to understand this key distinction and

the advantage Nietzsche thinks it affords. Attachments in themselves are not the problem; remaining stuck in any one or particular set of attachments is what Nietzsche finds so limiting. And the reason for this is that once stuck, one misses opportunities for further growth and development; one's capacities are diminished. I have derived this from analysis of Nietzsche's relatively later work, BGE, but the ideas are also evident, though they are somewhat less developed in a sustained way, in earlier writings (see, for example, *Dawn* 205–207).

We can now more fully examine the advantages of being *unstuck*. Nietzsche's reasoning here focuses on the opportunities for development that this affords: being unstuck does not mean being disconnected and isolated. In a condition, awkwardly described here in English for the purposes of this closer analysis as "being *unstuck*"—*Unabhängigkeit*—one is able to form other attachments so that *one is enabled* to expand the range of possible associations rather than limit it. Moreover, because of the way in which they hold their attachments, in contrast with the fettered spirits who are addicted to their attachments, free spirits, at least as described here, appear to be able to *love* in ways that a more narrow partiality might not allow. They enjoy "the greatest experience of human society" (D 205), avoid "inertia of spirit" (HH 637), and are better prepared for a new *form* of love, namely, what Nietzsche associates with a love of life (GS Preface to the Second Edition 3). If we recognize these considerations as related (being unstuck makes one available for, being open for, even more attachments of a different sort), then this provides opportunities to appreciate a distinctively affirmative dimension of Nietzsche's sense of independence and how it potentially positively, rather than negatively, impacts our relations with others.

Frequently in Nietzsche's texts, free spirits are described in terms of being great travelers: they associate with many different and *many different kinds of people*. This appears to be one of the ways in which they negatively avoid remaining stuck, but I think this same characteristic also positively contributes to who and what they are and what they are able to do. Nietzsche thinks they are "restlessly alive" through this "continual change" (HH 637). In these very same associations, part of what the free spirit is able to do by loosening himself from just one or several chains, is form many more associations, develop more and more of his own resources, "spiritual resources" (D 205). In being free from the limitations of the fettered spirit, free spirits are *free to become something more*. But, obviously, it is not sheer multiplicity that Nietzsche admires. Rather, he appears to think of this capacity in terms of a kind of fullness and amplitude, a bounty. I shall return to this topic below, but before doing so, I note that one of the ways in which the free spirit *cannot* be free—because no one can be—is in the sense of having a free will, realizing the classic notion of free will.

Of course, there is no single “classic notion of free will,” rather there are classical notions of free will, virtually all of which Nietzsche appears to reject. Nietzsche repeatedly and consistently rails against this view, offering as an alternative a drive psychology that explains the *experience* and *feeling of willing* as a particular perspective of a drive or set of drives in relation to the others, that is, the perspective of the commanding drive or drives that constitute us. Part of the reason why free will in this sense is not possible, Nietzsche thinks, is that he does not think there is any such thing as a will that somehow is in a relationship with other parts of the soul such that it can command. There is no separate ego or *I* behind our actions, willing or directing in the background. We are organizations of drives, and there are varieties of ways in which such organizations take shape and are maintained.¹⁵

Free spirits, by virtue of the extraordinary associations that their independence facilitates, have a greater, more expansive set of resources enlivened, activated, and ready for recruitment in the organizations they are. If this is a reasonable interpretation, then we might reconsider the various ways in which free spirits, so conceived, are enabled to become and can be said to be *free* (or not). In this respect, the freedom of the free spirit is realized in the relationship of its own constitutive parts or features rather than strictly with respect to other organizations or its political or social situation.

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

Of course, the interpretation offered here does not resolve all troubling and vexing features of Nietzsche’s philosophy; moreover, it opens new problems and challenges. For example, how does loosening attachment and amplifying available drives lead to strength rather than disintegration and chaos? That free spirits, so conceived, would be at risk for precisely this condition appears to be anticipated in Nietzsche’s association of independence with the Minotaur in the passage from BGE cited above. And it raises the question of how free spirits capitalize on the variety they acquire through their increased associations so that they can be said to be *enabled* by these resources rather than overwhelmed and ruined by them.

One of the dangers associated with enlivening more of the drives and expanding their capacities by virtue of amplifying or increasing one’s associations is that it may result in a situation more likely to produce conflict. Homogeneity would seem more conducive to psychic harmony, and such stability would seem to be important for the organization of drives and their recruitment for action, a recurrent theme in the history of moral psychology. The fettered soul has a dominant drive that whips into submission all of the others: the drive for unconditional truth maintains its rule in the fettered spirit

by subjugating the other drives. In this situation, as the Platonic Socrates so keenly observes of the tyrant in the *Republic*, the ruling power must always guard against losing its dominance; indeed the project of maintaining power must take precedence over any other. Such a situation is ultimately disabling because one quickly becomes unable to organize for any purpose other than this. It is hard to describe such persons as actually free, even if they have the semblance of tremendous power over others. Such powers might have a certain kind of order, but there is very much in them that would seem to be unfree.

The free spirit, on the other hand, becomes an expansive multiplicity of drives,¹⁶ and this potentially creates and nourishes more contenders for dominance in the soul. The free spirit, perhaps more than any type among Nietzsche's figures, faces certain risks, including a lack of order that would diminish rather than strengthen it. The challenge of the free spirit is to actively recruit the drives and their cooperation so that it can be free in another respect, namely, *free from* certain kinds of disabling conflicts among the drives as well as *freely enabled* and fit enough to realize the kind of activity described above. Although Nietzsche clearly articulates the need for unity in the form of "giving style to one's character" (GS 290) and even suggests how one might "combat the intensity of drives" (D 109), he does not provide us with a sufficiently robust account of how such unification might come about, or how it might work out the way he envisions for those who are not only free but also orderly, given style, strong.

Nietzsche himself at times appears to wonder how such unification, another kind of binding, is possible. In GS, in a passage titled "The Wanderer Speaks," which refers back to a figure featured in the title to one of the parts of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche writes:

That one *wants* to go precisely out there, up there, may be a minor madness, a peculiar and unreasonable "you must"—for we seekers for knowledge also have our idiosyncrasies of "unfree will"—the question is whether one really *can* get up there. This may depend on manifold conditions. In the main the question is how light or heavy we are—the problem of our "specific gravity." One must have liberated oneself [Man muss sich von Vielen losgebunden haben] from many things that oppress, inhibit, hold down, and make heavy precisely us Europeans today. (GS 380)

Whether it is possible to achieve the kind of loosening of attachment, the *levity* that would be required to achieve the perspective he anticipates, is surely not guaranteed, and there are certain cultural conditions and inheritances, leaving us with opposing tendencies, that would seem to be in tension with this, rendering modern Europeans more susceptible to the forces of (psychic) gravity, so to speak. About this, Nietzsche continues:

The human being of such a beyond who wants to behold the supreme measures of value of his time must first of all “overcome” this time in himself—this is the test of his strength—and consequently not only his time but also his prior aversion and contradiction *against* this time, his suffering from this time, his untimeliness, his *romanticism*. (GS 380)

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

While accounts of Nietzsche that emphasize the cultivation of the self are attractive¹⁷—both in terms of their anticipated shapely products as well as how they tidy up some philosophical problems—I am not fully satisfied with this response to the puzzle of how one might achieve unity from out of the incredible diversity that Nietzsche anticipates, which he speculates is both the *problem* and the *solution* to modern existence.¹⁸ Neither am I comfortable with going along with solving the problems another way by elaborating the transcendental conditions of agency and the “non-formal, ‘qualitative’ or substantive commitments necessary for freedom,” in large part because I think there is simply insurmountable evidence that Nietzsche does not have a normative ideal for what *we* (rather than *he*) might call “full personhood.”¹⁹ Nietzsche’s views about the self, setting aside his artful references to spirit and soul, suggest that there is no core subject, no *one* capable of the cultivation, no entity with sufficient independence to be the “artist” of our lives, and certainly no one distinct from the organization one already is.²⁰

Yet another solution might be sought in the role that education, self-education, and the cultivation of taste might play in shaping, organizing, and coordinating the multifarious drives that we are.²¹ And there are certainly passages to be found in Nietzsche’s works that demonstrate he gave serious consideration to such views (e.g., HH II AOM Preface: 2; TI Skirmishes 47), and this seems evident in Nietzsche’s own account of himself and how he overcame the influence of Wagner in his life and thought. But, ultimately, I think Nietzsche rather doubted that this was the definite and secure path to achieving psychic well-being. His ambivalence is expressed in D 119, in which he begins with the idea that self-knowledge about our constitutive elements or drives and their “nutrition,” how they themselves are fed and the ways in which they nourish, is really unknown, and seemingly unknowable:

Experience and make-believe.—No matter how hard a person struggles for self-knowledge, nothing can be more incomplete than the image of all the drives taken together that constitute his being. Scarcely can he call the cruder ones by name: their number and strength, their ebb and flow, their play and

counterplay, and, above all, the laws of their *alimentation* [*Ernährung*] remain completely unknown to him.²²

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

This alimentation thus becomes the work of chance [Zufalls]: our daily experiences toss willy-nilly to this drive or that drive some prey or other that it seizes greedily, but the whole coming and going of these events exists completely apart from any meaningful connection to the alimentary needs of the sum drives: so that the result will always be twofold: the starving and stunting of some drives and the overstuffing of others. With every moment of our lives some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others dry up, depending on the nourishment that the moment does or does not supply.²³

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

In understanding Nietzsche's conception of the independence of the free spirit, discussed above, I think we have some suggestions for how some forms of direction *might* be possible. I underscore *might* because, whatever may be the case, it is certainly true that there are no guarantees here, no recipes or blueprints to follow in becoming what one is. However, loosening the self for attachments, cultivating the variety of resources available would seem to make it at least *possible* that a different political or social structure for the soul might be in the offing. This much is suggested in the added preface to HH II AOM Preface 5,²⁴ where Nietzsche writes:

Just as a physician places his patient in a wholly strange environment so that he may be removed from his entire "hitherto", from his cares, friends, letters, duties, stupidities and torments of memory and learn to reach out his hands and senses to new nourishment, a new sun, a new future, so I, as physician and patient in one, compelled myself to an opposite and unexplored *clime of the soul*, and especially to a curative journey into strange parts, into *strangeness* itself, to an inquisitiveness regarding every kind of strange thing. . . . A protracted wandering around, seeking, changing followed from this, a repugnance towards all staying still, towards every blunt affirmation and denial; likewise a dietetic and discipline designed to make it as easy as possible for the spirit to run long distances, to fly to great heights, above all again and again to fly away. A *minimum* of life, in fact, and unchaining from all coarser desires,

an independence in the midst of all kinds of unfavorable outward circumstances together with pride in being *able* to live surrounded by these unfavorable circumstances; a certain amount of cynicism, perhaps, a certain amount of “barrel”, but just as surely a great deal of capricious happiness, capricious cheerfulness, a great deal of stillness, light, subtler folly, concealed enthusiasm—all this finally resulted in a great spiritual strengthening, an increasing joy and abundance of health.

This suggests that change: it suggests one is more than a token of a type, weak or strong. But, of course, the outcome here is uncertain, and there are many possibilities that emerge, including tyranny, chaos, and perhaps virtually anything in between.²⁵ Such risk might be inevitable and unavoidable; it might be what is required, what must be tolerated in, perhaps even loved about, the kind of experimentalism that the free spirits are supposed to exercise, the dancing they are supposed to engage in. (And not only dancing but also “rising, climbing, flying [steigen, klettern, fliegen],” all of which aim to overcome or not be subject to the pull of gravity, to hang below [abhang].) Experiments can be planned to greater and lesser degrees, and they are virtually always guided by what we already know and already value, or at least they are not wholly independent of such. Moreover, it is possible to lose ourselves within them.²⁶ I am uncertain how one plans to manage the inherent riskiness of this responsibly. Nietzsche provides no definite plan or direction, perhaps because any such guidance might amount to little more than wishful thinking: much as it might be desired, it might not be available. But such risk might nevertheless be *necessary*, and the resultant splendor that such risk taking potentially yields might be better described as product of chance rather than deliberate calculation or determined cultivation. If this is so, then we might say that the free spirit is free in yet one more sense—cosmically free, a piece of fate and chance, care free, and a “free throw” of the dice.²⁷

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this material was published as “Senses of Freedom of the Free Spirit” in *Pli: Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 25 (2014): 13–33. I am grateful to audiences who provided suggestions and critical feedback as I developed these ideas. I especially thank those at Warwick University, Stony Brook University, and the Nietzsche Assos conference.

2. For a developmental account of the free spirit, particularly in relation to Nietzsche’s views about science and culture, see Jonathan Cohen, *Science, Culture, and Free Spirits: A Study of Nietzsche’s “Human, All Too Human”* (New York: Humanity Books, 2009). Amy Mullin also argues for a process of development that admits of various degrees of realization of the ideal she thinks Nietzsche advocates. See her “Nietzsche’s Free Spirit,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38(3) (July 2000): 383–405.

3. I cite the following translations of Nietzsche’s works: *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, trans. Brittain Smith (Stanford: Stanford University

Press, 2011); *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

4. Mullin emphasizes the solitude of the free spirit in her “Nietzsche’s Free Spirit,” 396f, without further recognizing the kinds of relationships Nietzsche also imagines for free spirits (and why).

5. It is not hard to find other passages in which it appears that Nietzsche is keen to emphasize that freedom for free spirits entails freedom from domestic obligations of various sorts. See, for example, HH 426, 429, and 433, although anyone interested in this particular feature of Nietzsche’s philosophy should review such passages in their broader context. In the case of the examples just cited, the epigraphs appear in a section (7) with the title “Woman and Child.” Both their style and content resemble a group of epigraphs that appear in part 7 of BGE, beginning with the heading “Seven Epigrams on Woman.”

6. Bernard Reginster, “What Is a Free Spirit? Nietzsche on Fanaticism” in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 85(1) (2003): 51–85.

7. Cited in Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 294.

8. For a more extended discussion of the “ass” figure in Nietzsche and as it relates to these themes, see Kathleen Marie Higgins, “Nietzsche and the Mystery of the Ass,” in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 100–119.

9. Some context related to the composition of the text is helpful. Nietzsche finished *Beyond Good and Evil* in early summer 1885. During the period when he was writing the text, he spent time in Venice, a home of Bruno. While Nietzsche was in Venice, a group of notable figures formed an international committee to erect a monument to Bruno on the site of his execution in Rome. The committee included Victor Hugo (cf. TI Skirmishes 1), Herbert Spencer, Ernest Renan (cf. TI “Skirmishes” 2), Ernst Haeckel, Henrik Ibsen, and Ferdinand Gregorovius. So if we want to know who it is that Nietzsche targets when he talks about the wrong kind of free spirits, we might explore these. The statue of Bruno was eventually erected in 1889.

10. This passage is discussed in its context, elaborating some of the same points below, in *Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil: A Reader’s Guide*, which I coauthored with Keith Ansell-Pearson (New York: Continuum, 2011).

11. Some notable discussions of Ariadne include Gilles Deleuze, “The Mystery of Ariadne According to Nietzsche,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, translated by Daniel W. Smith (University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Gary Shapiro, *Nietzschean Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

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

13. For a different, but interesting, account of the significance of the affective orientation toward truth in Nietzsche with respect to its bearing on freedom, see Peter Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom,” in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, edited by Ken Gemes and Simon May (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 170–77.

14. Mullin helpfully observes that Nietzsche thinks the illusion of free will leads to some of the worst intellectual habits (391f). This remains focused on the free spirits’ *beliefs* about freedom, specifically freedom of the will. Nietzsche is also concerned with *conditions* of relative freedom and unfreedom as related to the development of a free spirit.

15. I elaborate these ideas in various publications, most recently my “Beholding Nietzsche: *Ecce Homo*, Fate, and Freedom,” in *Oxford Handbook on Nietzsche*, edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and in a broader context of Nietzsche’s assessments of morality and moral philosophy in my *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

16. Nietzsche expresses admiration for this type, not necessarily linked with free spirits, in BGE 212. Compare GS 290 and TI “Skirmishes” 49. See also discussion by Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom,” 153ff.

17. See, for example Keith Ansell-Pearson, “On Nietzsche’s Moral Therapy in *Dawn*,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 44(2) (2011): 179–204; and Michael Ure, *Nietzsche’s Therapy*:

Self-Cultivation in the Middle Works (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008). See also the essay by Rebecca Bamford in this volume.

18. Nietzsche elaborates this problem (and anticipates the solution) in part 8 of BGE. For discussion, see Acampora and Ansell-Pearson, 2011.

19. See Poellner, "Nietzschean Freedom," 154.

20. For a possible "third way" between artist and no one, see Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

21. See the chapter by Duncan Large in this volume.

22. Citation of Nietzsche's *Dawn* is drawn from Brittain Smith's translation, *Dawn*; I have also consulted Hollingdale's translation.

23. Illuminating discussion of this image of the polyp as it relates to Nietzsche's drive psychology can be found in Brian Domino, "Polyp Man," in *A Nietzschean Bestiary*, 42–49.

24. Hollingdale's translation.

25. If we take the free spirit not as an individual but rather more like the spirit of an age or a spiritual capacity that might be realized by or characteristic of groups, peoples, then we might make more headway on thinking about how such organizations and reorganizations might work by looking at how Nietzsche thinks about the current independence of Europe, its resultant *disintegration* and its simultaneous desire to become one. Being "a good European" might be one way of realizing free spirituality in such a case.

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

27. See GS 277.

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