

Nietzsche on Digestion and Nutrition

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“ich liebe die widerspänstigen wählerischen Magen und Zungen”

Introduction

One of the main issues that became central during the present Corona crisis was the importance of healthy food and nutrition for physical resilience and robustness. At an early stage of the spreading of COVID-19, the connection between bad food habits and the risks of dying because of infectious diseases was made. In *TIME* of April 28, 2020, the cardiologist Dr Dariush Mozaffarian states: “Poor metabolic health is devastating for resilience of the population [...]. We need a healthier food system through better policy, not just the random chance disaster of restaurants being closed.” And indeed, large, worldwide health-related organisations, like UNICEF and the WHO, all came up with nutritional advice and tips that support a healthier living to fight e.g. obesity and increase the population’s resistance against the worst symptoms of infection. The advices are well-known: eat more fresh food and vegetables, more wholemeals instead of refined meal products and less instant or fast food, which often contains too much sugar, salt and saturated fat.

In Nietzsche’s critique of culture, food and nutrition, as well as the digestive system’s functioning, play an essential role, too. In his ‘autobiography’ *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes: ‘I am much more interested in a question on which the “salvation of humanity” depends far more than on any theologians’ curio: the question of *nutrition*. For ordinary use, one may formulate it thus: “how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength [...]?” (EH Clever1).

Well-known are Nietzsche’s – at first sight almost absurd – dietary insights that he shares in *Ecce Homo*. For instance: ‘No meals between meals, no coffee: coffee spreads darkness. *Tea* is wholesome only in the morning’ (EH Clever 1). There is little agreement in secondary literature on how to interpret these kinds of phrases. With some interpreters, one can see a tendency of taking these kinds of quotes almost literally, e.g. by focussing strongly on the “food” part, without a serious exploration of possible other functions (like polemic, or performative ones). Others are simply puzzled about the meaning of these

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enigmatic texts. When commenting on GS 145, entitled ‘Danger for vegetarians’, in which Nietzsche e.g. writes that ‘a diet that consists predominantly of potatoes leads to the use of liquor’, the ‘gastrosopher’ Michel Onfray writes: ‘les raisons du philosophe sont obscures. Aucune tradition orale ou symbolique, aucune coutume ne fournit d’arguments en ce sens’ (Onfray 1989 138)².

When studying Nietzsche’s use of words like ‘Verdauung’ (digestion) and ‘Magen’(stomach) for the lemma ‘verdauen’ to be published in the Nietzsche *Wörterbuch*³, it was striking to see the large number of fragments that compared the functioning of the spirit to that of a stomach. In almost all cases the stomach was seen as a more original and more impactful ‘digester’ than the spirit. In EH Nietzsche claims e.g. that the “spirit” is ‘merely an aspect’ of the metabolism (EH Clever 2). In the *Zarathustra*, after comparing the mind’s learning process to a (bad) digestion, he even *identifies* the mind and the stomach (‘For verily, my brothers, the spirit *is* a stomach’; Z III ‘Tables; italics for Nietzsche’s underlining). Especially in the texts until the early 1880ties, words like ‘stomach’ and ‘digestion’ were used in an almost exclusive metaphorical sense (with a partly exception of Nietzsche’s letters). In Nietzsche’s later works, the use of physiological terms augmented, yet the meaning of what is said, is rarely purely ‘literal’.

Despite the (seeming) absurdity of many of Nietzsche’s advices, the question stands what Nietzsche wanted to tell or to provoke when using these digestive terms, whether they are to be taken literally or as metaphors. In this article, I would like to find out what a hermeneutic detour by Nietzsche’s philosophy of the metabolism can – or cannot – teach us for our times’ challenges. Nietzsche calls himself a ‘physician of culture’, providing a diagnosis, prognosis and therapy for modern culture⁴. How should we understand his remarks on digestion in this light? What kind of lessons can be learned – if any – from Nietzsche’s insights on a healthy functioning metabolism?

Nietzsche on the stomach and on digestion

When assembling and analysing all spots where Nietzsche used the words ‘stomach’ and ‘digestion’, we found two descriptions of a healthy and robust digestion that returned time and again. On the one hand, Nietzsche’s strong ‘stomachs’ were described as the ones that could digest the heaviest, most ‘indigestible’ chunks of ‘food’. On the other hand, it was mainly the very choosy stomachs, selecting their input and excreting all that they did not like, that were praised.

² ‘The reasons of the philosopher are obscure. No oral or symbolic tradition, no custom provides arguments for this.’ ‘Gastrosophy’ studies the philosophical meanings of food, diet and nutrition, but also of the enjoyment of food (it often contains hedonic elements) and of the rituals related to food, like the sharing of a table and enjoying supper together (cf. Lemke 2014 10ff on the origins of the philosophical current of gastrosophy, cf. also Mattenklott 1984 183ff). Underlying this critique is a too intellectual or spiritual focus on conscious or rational thought in the history of Western European thought and an undervaluation of sensual, emotional and bodily aspects of culture and thought. Central point of reference is the saying of Paracelsus, later made famous by Feuerbach: ‘der Mensch ist, was er isst’ (‘A human is, what he eats’; cf. Mattenklott 1984 186; more elaborately on Feuerbach’s thesis: Lemke 2016 475-505). Influential representatives of gastrosophy are Michel Onfray (1989; 1995) in France and Harald Lemke (2014, 2016) in Germany.

³ The Nietzsche Wörterbuch can be found In *Nietzsche Online* (n.d.). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. <http://www.degruyter.com/view/NO>

⁴ Cf. Tongeren, P. van (2000; p. 2-13) who provides a helpful explanation of these three ‘medical’ aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy.



In this article, some characteristics that are according to Nietzsche typical for modernity, shall be presented. I will point out why these characteristics are relevant for understanding Nietzsche's use of the word 'stomach', by focusing on how modernity provokes disoriented and weak forms of digestion. Then we will have a look at the two kinds of strong stomachs that function as alternatives. Subsequently, we will try to find out in how far these two alternative models are contradicting, or in how far they can be thought together. Finally, we will try to see whether we can learn something from Nietzsche's thoughts on the stomach, nutrition and digestion for the challenges of the Corona pandemic that we presented at the beginning of this article.

'The noblest stands right next to the meanest!' (BGE 244)

One of the most striking features of Nietzsche's contemporary Europeans, and especially of the Germans, is that they have an 'ignoble taste' (BGE 224). What does this 'ignoble taste' consist in, and how is this 'ignobility' reflected in a stomach that is unable to digest properly? In BGE Nietzsche sheds some light on the origins of this deficiency.

In BGE 244, Nietzsche describes the German soul as a 'most monstrous mixture and medley' (BGE 244). It is characterised by chaos and inner contradictions. This soul is a result of the mingling – over generations - of various classes in society and diverse cultural traditions. In former days the different classes and their respective cultural traditions were carefully held separate. In those days, people of nobler descent eschewed a mixing up with people and cultural phenomena that belonged to society's more ordinary layers. Nietzsche typically describes the noble taste of these more distinguished members of society, in gustatory terms: 'The very definite Yes and No of their palate, their easy nausea, their hesitant reserve toward everything foreign' (BGE 224) made that they kept distance from the ordinary.

This deliberately chosen distance between various layers of society has disappeared in the nineteenth century. The mixing-up of cultures within an individual resulted in the German soul, which is 'above all manifold, of diverse origins, more put together and superimposed than actually built' (BGE 244 5.184).

The inner plurality of impressions and experiences within oneself, is so overwhelming for modern Europeans, that they lose the overview of what is happening inside themselves. They can no longer oversee and structure the plurality that they *are*. This loss of inner structure and orientation is reflected in an outer lack of a feeling for distinctions and hierarchy. Translated to the domain of the European 'stomach', and especially the German one, this means that because of its non-discriminatory and therefore very lenient taste, the stomach takes in almost everything, without selection. Modern Europeans have developed an 'instinct for everything, the taste and tongue for everything' (BGE 224). As Nietzsche puts it a few years later in *Ecce Homo*, the Germans are 'gobbling down, without any digestive troubles "faith" as well as scientific manners, "Christian Love" as well as anti-Semitism, the will to power (to the *Reich*) as well as the *évangile des humbles*' (EH Books CW).

The inner contradictions and fragmentation of the modern soul go hand in hand with the acceleration and dissemination of information and means of communication. In one of his late fragments, Nietzsche lists some thoughts under the heading "Modernity" under

the metaphor of nutrition and digestion' (KSA 12, 464). He describes what the overwhelming inner and outer impressions do to modern man:

The sensitivity unspeakably more irritable [...] The abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever / - the cosmopolitism of food, of literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even sceneries etc. / — the tempo of this influx a prestissimo; the impressions wipe out themselves; one instinctively refuses to take something in, take something deep, “digest” something' (KSA 12, 464)

The impact of inner and outer stimuli that reinforce each other, has overrun the carrying capacities of modern man. '[T]he result is a weakening of the digestive power. A kind of adaptation to this overload of impressions occurs: the human being unlearns how to be proactive; **he only reacts** to external arousals' (KSA 12, 464).

In this respect, Nietzsche sees the composer Richard Wagner as the ultimate example of modernity: 'Wagner sums up modernity' (CW Preface). He does so grotesquely and theatrically, which makes him into the 'Cagliostro of modernity' (CW 5). According to Nietzsche Wagner is a typical degenerate⁵; a sickly, highly-irritable and overstimulated product of 19th century, *Fin de Siècle* Germany. He suffers from an 'overexcited sensibility', which he tries to numb by searching for ever more stimuli. This leads in the end to 'a taste that required ever stronger spices' (CW 5). He is so overwhelmed by all these stimuli, that he cannot differentiate between them, and even less select them and position himself.

Already before Nietzsche distanced himself openly from Wagner, in 1868, he writes in a letter to his friend Erwin Rohde that Wagner is a 'representative of a modern dilettantism that absorbs and digests all directions in art' (KSB 08/10/1868). And in EH, looking back to his *The Case Wagner*, Nietzsche exclaims about the modern Germans: 'Such a failure to take sides among opposites! Such neutrality and “selflessness” of the stomach!' And as he does more often in this context, he relates this inability to set hierarchies and take sides to a 'palate' governed by an ethos of 'equal rights' (EH Books (CW) 1).

In Nietzsche's oeuvre, there are many references to such a loss of taste and the inability to position oneself in the modern age. Often, this loss is expressed explicitly in metaphors related to digestion. In *Daybreak*, we can read on 'The nourishment of modern man. – Modern man understands how to digest many things – it is his kind of ambition: but he would be of a higher order, if he did *not* understand it; *homo pamphagus* is not the finest of species' (D 171; cf. also KSA 10, 265). And in the *Zarathustra*: 'Omni-satisfaction, which knows how to taste everything, that is not the best taste. I honor the recalcitrant, choosy tongues and stomachs, which have learned to say “I” and “yes” and “no.” But to chew and digest everything – that is truly the swine's manner' (Z III Spirit 2).

It is this inner 'most monstrous mixture and medley' (BGE 244) that on the one hand makes the present-day Germans more unpredictable and somehow also more interesting than their predecessors. The vast spectrum of cultures that they have gained access to makes them more curious. They are always searching for new experiences, unknown domains of knowledge and culture, and are willing to explore their possibilities and

⁵ For a more elaborate analysis of the hyper-irritability discourse in the nineteenth century, and Nietzsche's use of this discourse, I refer to the article in 'Entartung/Degeneration' in the *Nietzsche Wörterbuch* (Hermens, J. n.d.).



question what is known and comfortable. The Germans have ‘an enviable appetite to feed on opposites’ (EH Books (CW) 1).

Yet, most modern people do not fulfil the preconditions to make this inner multitude productive. Modern Germans, just like most modern Europeans, are too internally disoriented to deal with inner and outer pluralities and oppositions appropriately. Divergent traditions that have become part of German identity over the years are indiscriminately integrated to the hotchpotch of the soul. This makes that the potential that this incorporated plurality could have had cannot be realised. It is the ‘craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself’ (BGE 257) that characterises some strong people of nobler descent, that is altogether absent.

‘[T]eeth and stomachs for the most indigestible’ (JGB 44 5.62)

Yet, a few people can turn this problematic inner diversity into a challenge and a source of self-overcoming. They are the ones about whom Nietzsche wonders in one of his late notes: ‘What must people be like (‘beschaffen sein’), that value conversely? People who have all characteristics of the modern soul but are strong enough to transform them into pure health’ (KSA 12,109).

When we focus on the aspect of digestion and the stomach, the answer is twofold. On the one hand there are the stomachs that provide a strong answer to the ‘enviable appetite to feed on opposites’ (EH Books (CW) 1) of modern man, by searching for and incorporating that food that is most foreign to them. On the other hand, there is the stomachs and tongues that – opposed to the ignoble, all eating taste of modernity- are very picky, very selective when it comes to which food to eat.

The first idea, that of a stomach that can digest even the ‘indigestible’ and that searches for ‘food’ that is most foreign to itself, mirrors the central Nietzschean appeal on his readers to proactively search the most vigorous opposites and opponents. It reminds us of Nietzsche’s calling on philosophers to search for their ‘antipodes’ (GS 289); the one’s that are their (spiritual) opposites. It also reminds us of Nietzsche’s relation to Wagner, whom he calls such an antipode (cf. *NcW* Preface), and who was, according to Nietzsche, one of the main causes of his illness. Yet, throughout his late works, Nietzsche expresses his gratitude towards Wagner. It was precisely *because* of his friendship with Wagner that Nietzsche could experience the illness of modernity in its most intense form, which was again a necessary precondition for Nietzsche to overcome this illness (cf. e.g. *CW* Preface).

When it comes to digestion, we can find several fragments that hint at the importance of the proactive search for food that is most foreign to oneself. In a fragment of his notebooks, which is entitled ‘Cure for the individual’, Nietzsche appeals to the individual that he ‘should mentally lean on to his enemies, he should try to eat their food. He should *travel* in every sense’ (KSA 9, 539). It is the toughest stomachs that will digest what is most alien to them, what is most ‘indigestible’. Nietzsche characterises his own free spirits, as opposed to the so-called free spirits and ‘libres-penseurs’ of his times, as having ‘teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible’ (BGE 44). And in the time he is preparing his *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*, he writes that it is the ‘strongest and most powerful’ eras that can ‘digest’, transform ‘in flesh in blood’, most history, whilst weaker eras would

be overwhelmed by too much history. They would suffer of ‘digestive problems [...] fatigue and weakness’ (KSA 7, 638).

The ideal of a discriminatory, selective stomach

The second kind of answer to the challenges of the inner plurality of the modernity, is that of a stomach that is very selective, excreting everything that is not beneficial to the self. Some very few can find, in the midst of confusing times, the instinctual certainty of *what* to select, *what* to incorporate and *what* to excrete. The American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson is such a person: ‘One who instinctively nourishes himself only on ambrosia, leaving behind what is indigestible in things’ (TI Skirmishes 13; cf. also KSA 13, 21)?

This ideal of a very choosy taste is maybe described most tellingly in a self-interpretation in *Ecce Homo*. Nietzsche here describes how after a long period of illness, he recovered and ‘tasted all good and little things, as others cannot easily taste them’ (EH Wise 2). In his description of what characterises his ‘Wohlgerathenheit’, (translated as (the condition of) ‘the well-turned-out person’), three elements that are closely connected to choosiness come to the fore:

First of all, a ‘wohlgerathen’ person has a sharp self-knowledge: ‘he has a taste only for what is good for him; his pleasure, his delight cease where the measure of what is good for him is transgressed’.

Secondly, and closely related to the first, he has a strong sense of discrimination and an ability of selection: ‘Instinctively, he collects from everything he sees, hears, lives through, *his* sum: he is a principle of selection, he discards much [...] he honors by *choosing*, by *admitting*, by *trusting*.’

Finally, he knows how to excrete that what hampers him: ‘he knows how to *forget* – he is strong enough’ (EH Wise 2).

If, indeed, “‘the spirit’ is relatively most similar to a stomach’ (BGE 230), in how far does Nietzsche elucidate what he writes here with the help of metaphors of digestion? Let’s have a closer look at each of the conditions/elements. I take them in reverse order. The third point, the importance of the ability to forget, is one of the most prominent phenomena that Nietzsche explains in gastric terms. Often Nietzsche speaks about e.g. his contemporary Germans, or about modern Europeans, as ‘dyspeptics’ suffering from an ‘indigestion’, because they are not able to digest the ‘food’ that they take in: ‘The German spirit is an indigestion: it does not finish with anything’ (EH Clever 1). Either the dyspeptics cannot ‘discharge’ the food they do not need, or they overload themselves and cannot cope with the pace or the amount of input that needs to be processed.

According to Nietzsche, it is of utmost importance to let new experiences and impressions rest and ‘ruminate’ them to digest them properly. ‘From time to time [one] should rest over [one’s] experiences – and digest them’ (KSA 9,539). Moreover, one should know when the limit of the number of impressions or the pace with which they come in, is reached. We saw this before as the typical challenge of modern times: ‘The abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever / - the cosmopolitism of food, of literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even sceneries etc. / — the tempo of this influx a prestissimo’



(KSA 12, 264). It is therefore that Nietzsche describes how a strong person can be typified by ‘a suddenly erupting decision in favour of ignorance, of deliberate exclusion, a shutting of one’s windows, an internal No to this or that thing [...] all of which is necessary in proportion to a spirit’s power to appropriate, its “digestive capacity,” to speak metaphorically’ (BGE 230).

In the second book of the *Genealogy of Morals* the importance of an ‘active forgetfulness’ is prominent. Here it is argued that we should avoid our experiences to enter our consciousness the moment we are still experiencing them. Otherwise, proper digestion and incorporation will be hampered. Again, we find metaphors comparable to those in BGE 230. It is all about the ability “[t]o close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness to make room for new things’ (GM II 1). He who is not able to do this, is described as a ‘dyspeptic - he cannot “have done” with anything’ (GM II 1; cf. also GM III 16 and, earlier: WS 297).

The second characteristic of a ‘wohlgerathen’ person, that is, the ability to select and discriminate, is closely related to the previous one. It is the challenge of dealing with the ‘abundance of disparate impressions’ (KSA 12, 264) critically and selectively. Nietzsche almost seems to speak through the mouth of Zarathustra if he says: ‘I honor the recalcitrant, choosy tongues and stomachs, which have learned to say “I” and “yes” and “no.”’ (Z III Spirit 2). As we have seen before, it is exactly the lack of the ability to position oneself, that Nietzsche detests of his contemporary Germans. Yet he still seems to have hope for the future. Also in the ignoble nineteenth century, some people still had the instinctive certainty of knowing what was best for them, and there might be opportunities for a new kind of noble taste to arise in the future. In an aphorism entitled ‘The nourishment of modern man’ Nietzsche writes: ‘We live between a past which had a more perverse (‘verrückteren’, I would prefer the translation ‘weird’ or ‘crazy’ here; JH) and stubborn taste than we and a future which will perhaps have a more discriminating one – we live too much in the middle’ (D 171).

Before we look at the third element of ‘wohlgerathenheit’ (i.e. the first one mentioned by Nietzsche), which was on the ability to identify what is right for oneself, as a sub-ability of a selective stomach, I would like to return to our initial questions. It was on Nietzsche’s presentation of modern stomachs’ weaknesses under modernity conditions, and on two competing models of a strong stomach. At first sight, these two seemed to contradict. The first one was the stomach that could incorporate the strongest oppositions, that could ‘digest’ the ‘indigestible.’ The second example seemed to be opposed to it: it was a very selective stomach, one that did not have the ambition to overcome and incorporate the biggest resistances, but that actively searched for that food that was most beneficial to itself.

Yet: in some aphorisms, these two opposite stomachs seem to coincide. In a late note we read: ‘The strong human being, powerful in the instincts of a strong health, digests his deeds in the same way as he digests his meals; he can cope with heavy food himself’ (KSA 12, 305). This seems to be a clear example of the ideal of a stomach that can deal with heavy, or even ‘the heaviest’ kinds of food. But surprisingly after a colon (which may indicate that the second part is an explanation of the first), the text goes on like this: ‘but

in the main he is guided by an intact and a strict instinct, that he does nothing that resists him, any more than he eats something that he doesn't like' (KSA 12, 305). So now the stomach that can eat the heaviest food is explained *in terms of* the highly selective stomach, as it doesn't eat what it doesn't like.

'One has to know the size of one's stomach' (EH Clever 1).

How can these two be thought together? Here the third element of the 'wohlgerathenen' human being, can point the way. It sounded: 'he has a taste only for what is good for him; his pleasure, his delight cease where the measure of what is good for him is transgressed' (EH Wise 2). Central in these sentences is the twofold repeated 'what is good for *him*' (italics by me, JH). Besides the general guidelines for healthy food, as presented at the beginning of this chapter, Nietzsche will always closely relate the health impact of a certain diet to the individual person that one is. It is a challenge for every individual to find out what kind of health fits his particular body and personality, '[f]or there is no health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures. Even the determination of what is healthy for your *body* depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors, and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul' (GS 120).

What is valid for health as such, applies to proper nutrition, as well. It depends on your aspirations, together with the possibilities (and limitations) of your body, what the most sound diet looks like. As Nietzsche says about himself and his like-minded spirits: 'It is not fat but the greatest possible suppleness and strength that a good dancer desires from his nourishment – and I would not know what the spirit of a philosopher might wish more to be than a good dancer' (GS 381). In many of Nietzsche's texts, it is this search for the diet that suits the specific needs of the individual best, is central: 'We have different needs, grow differently, and also have a different digestion: we need more, we also need less' (GS 381). Because '[w]hat one individual needs for his health, is already a cause of illness for another' (HH I 286). Neither the kind of 'food', nor the amount can be determined in more general guidelines, because: 'How much a spirit needs for its nourishment, for this there is no formula' (GS 381).

The fact that many overlook the close connection between the kind of body and person that one is, and the food that one needs to stay healthy, is illustrated by the example of the Italian Humanist thinker Luigi Cornaro (+1467-1566). Cornaro wrote a book about his life, which was translated in English as *The Sure and Certain Method of Attaining a Long and Healthful Life* (1550). In this book, he described how a very restrictive and moderate diet and lifestyle made him still very healthy and vigorous at old age. The book had several reprints, and Cornaro got many followers, who copied his diet and hoped for a long and happy life.

According to Nietzsche, these followers of Cornaro were trapped in a fallacy: they confused the cause and the effect of Cornaro's long life. According to Nietzsche, it was not so much the slender diet that was the cause of Cornaro's long life. The long life was enabled by having a diet that perfectly fit Cornaro's specific needs. As Cornaro had a very slow metabolism (according to Nietzsche), he had no choice but to eat small amounts of food. Yet, most people, especially in our modern and hectic times, have a rapid metabolism, and following Cornaro's dietary insights can, in their case, lead to starving



oneself. 'A scholar in *our* time, with his rapid consumption of nervous energy, would simply destroy himself with Cornaro's diet. *Crede experto*' (TI Errors 1).

This makes that Nietzsche's main appeal on his readers is the classic maxim 'know thyself', which in the ancient Greek can also be translated as 'know thy measure'. As Nietzsche puts it in EH 'one has to know the size of one's stomach' (EH Clever 1). Only if one knows one's 'stomach', that is one's 'digestive' constitution and capacity, one can understand what one should 'take in', and what one shouldn't.

This appeal to 'eat' in accordance with one's constitution is not just directed at the strongest, but also at the weaker and weakest 'stomachs'. In his EH Nietzsche reflects on his own experiences in his moments of most profound illness, eaten up by a feeling of resentment. He describes his own experiences as follows: 'one cannot get rid of anything, one cannot get over anything, one cannot repel anything – everything hurts' (EH wise 6). It is precisely this description that Nietzsche also uses for dyspeptics ('he cannot "have done" with anything' (GM II 1) and: 'it does not finish with anything' (EH Clever 1)). The only thing that helps in such a situation is what Nietzsche calls 'Russian fatalism'. It is the fatalism of a Russian soldier, who cannot join in the military campaign anymore. Even at the moment of the most intense illness and exhaustion, the soldier demonstrates a last spark of health, by intuitively acting in a way that is appropriate in this situation; that is in line with his body's requirements. He reduces all physiological activities to the minimum, in that way avoiding any squandering of energy. In this way, Russian fatalism 'can [...] preserve life under the most perilous conditions by reducing the metabolism, slowing it down, as a kind of will to hibernate' (EH Wise 6).

Nietzsche's personal use of medical advises and the use of his thoughts for our times

As we have seen, the 'most picky' stomach does not need to clash with the one that searches for the 'indigestible'. The bridge between the two was made with the maxim of 'know thyself'. If someone has an intuitive certainty of what is good for himself, he can find the right measure in what amounts and what kind of 'food' to take in. For some people, modernity's challenges and jeopardies function as a trigger to make the best out of themselves. For those, who live after the motto 'what does not kill [me], makes [me] stronger' (EH Wise 2), the search for the most vigorous opponents or the most indigestible food (the first form of strength) and the ability to recognize and select the right challenges (the second form of strength) might be exactly the right thing to do.

Finally, we should return to our initial question: can Nietzsche add insights to WHO and Unicef's dietary advice? Can Nietzsche's philosophical view on an individual, tailor-made diet have an added value for the current medical discussions? I think it most certainly can: all dietary measurements have to be translated to people's personal lives, to be effective. This, however, does not mean that Nietzsche's insights make the WHO prescriptions of less value. Nietzsche also did not intend to devalue medical guidelines; he rather wanted to adjust them to (his) personal needs.

Nietzsche's interest in contemporary medical insights are well-known. He read a lot of popular and scientific literature on how to alleviate his stomach ailments and his general bad health situation. These books varied from medical handbooks like Michael Fosters

Lehrbuch der Physiologie (Textbook of Physiology; 1881), to more specific practical guides on stomach problems and their treatment, like *Die Ernährungsgesetze Liebigs in neuester Fassung und das neue Nahrungsmittel Malto-Legüminose* by Hermann von Liebig (The laws of Liebig in the newest version and the new nutrient Malto-Legüminose; 1878) or *Wie ernährt man sich gut und billig? Ein Beitrag zur Ernährungsfrage* by C.A. Meinert (How can one nourish oneself well and economically? A contribution to the question of nutrition; 1882)⁶.

Moreover, one can find several book(let)s that belonged to Nietzsche's personal library in the Herzogin Anna Amalia Library in Weimar, written by physicians who had personally medicated Nietzsche. Examples are Josef Wiel's *Diätetisches Koch-Buch mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den Tisch für Magenranke* (Dietetic cookbook with special consideration for the table for stomach patients; 1873) and his *Tisch für Magenranke* (Table for stomach patients; 1875). Time and again, he tried to follow and try out dr. Wiel's prescriptions (cf. e.g. KSB 5, 79ff; KSB 5, 347f). In several letters Nietzsche narrates about his experiences at Wiel's health resorts. For instance, in 1875:

with my stomach it's a tedious thing (as dr Wiel says himself); the enlargement of the stomach is nothing significant, the cure is also successful in this respect. [...] After all, dr Wiel also thinks, like Immermann, that the reason lies in a nervous affection of the stomach, that is, therefore, connected with the head. [...]— Only a long, very regular domestic diet can help me (KSB 5, 99)

Interesting in this letter is that it is – again – a good example of self-critique, and so of the self-referentiality of Nietzsche's 'medical' critique of culture: Nietzsche, too, is dealing with psychological problems that are, as we can read in other letters, related to the pathological and sick-making state of contemporary culture, and just like his contemporaries this comes to the fore in what we would call psycho-somatic diseases. Moreover, the letter confirms that Nietzsche takes the advice that he gets from medical doctors very seriously.

When it comes to the relevance of Nietzsche's philosophical insights in 'medical' issues, one can observe that Nietzsche's call for a more individual and person-centred approach does resonate in the recent medical-ethical debates⁷. To give but one example: in 2014 there was a philosophical conference at the medical faculty of the University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands) that was devoted to Nietzsche's ideas on health. The target groups were mainly medical specialists, nurses, social workers and managers in healthcare. Especially the potential contribution of Nietzsche's thinking to the newly developing 'personalised healthcare' found great resonance⁸. In personalised health care the choice for a treatment that fits the patient's life-narrative can get precedence over the strictly medical treatment criteria. An example was given of a homeless person who could not take his dog into an asylum for the homeless. Although from a strict medical point of view, he would be better off in the asylum, the social workers organised that he could sleep in the barn next to the asylum and so keep his dog with him. It was mainly the following statement that, according

⁶ For more titles and input on Nietzsche's reading of medical literature, I would like to refer to Aurenque (2018).

⁷ Cf. Aurenque (2018, pp. 151ff) for more references on the recent upswing of Nietzsche's thoughts in medicine, and especially in disciplines like psychiatry and psychology

⁸ The proceedings of the conference (all in Dutch) were published in: *Podium voor Bio-ethiek*, jaargang 21, no. 4, December 2014. Special issue on the topic Nietzsches Filosofie van de Grote gezondheid.



to the participants, was still highly topical, and may well inspire the physicians and nutritionists struggling with the current corona-related health challenges:

Thus there are innumerable healths of the body; and the more we allow the unique and incomparable to raise its head again, and the more we abjure the dogma of the “equality of men,” the more must the concept of a *normal* health, along with a normal diet and the normal course of an illness, be abandoned by medical men (GS 120)

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