

Truthful Dying: Illuminating the Higher Types' Attitude Toward Literal and Symbolic Death

Brian Lightbody¹

Abstract

*Nietzsche's philosophy draws a sharp distinction between higher types and weaker individuals, the former defined by traits such as self-respect, resilience, and an affirmation of life—particularly through the acceptance of the Eternal Return. However, what it means for higher types to affirm life in all its tragic dimensions remains unclear. This paper argues that understanding their attitude toward death—what I term AD—is crucial for illuminating their life-affirming disposition. I challenge prevailing third-person, static interpretations (e.g., Leiter's), proposing instead a dynamic, first-person approach informed by Foucault's notion of technologies of the self and rapport à soi. I show that higher types affirm life precisely by confronting and integrating death—both literal and symbolic—into their self-conception. Through close readings of *Twilight of the Idols* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I argue that higher types practice a “consummating death,” grounded in truthful self-reflection about their life's goal and their diminishing capacity to pursue it. This technology of self—a practiced relationship to dying—reveals not only the psychological structure of Nietzschean strength but offers transposable strategies for those of us who are not higher types. Ultimately, affirming life may begin with learning how to die—truthfully, purposefully, and at the right time.*

Keywords: Nietzsche; death; rapport à soi; technology of the self; higher type

Nietzsche's work invites a multitude of interpretations. One feature, however, that remains constant among the vast and diverse readings of Nietzsche's philosophy in the secondary literature is the distinction the German philosopher makes between higher individuals and weak types. According to Brian Leiter, Nietzsche's highest types, unlike their dissolute counterparts, exhibit five characteristics, including seeking burdens, self-reverence, resilience, and a need for solitude.² One additional quality is the higher types' affirmation of life, especially in relation to willing the Eternal Return. It is the capacity for the higher types to endorse and even celebrate the idea that, should all temporal events repeat themselves in an infinite loop, their lives will unfold precisely as they did from birth to death. It is this idea of what it means for a higher type to affirm life, from a first-person point of view, that I seek to address in this paper.

Despite Leiter's connection between the asservation of life and Eternal Return, it remains unclear how (and why) higher types affirm life in all its sundry and all-too-often tragic aspects. In my view, there are two key issues at play. First, in order to gain purchase on life-affirmation for higher types, it is crucial to examine the contrasting view, namely their attitude towards death—an outlook that, to my knowledge, has not been sufficiently explored in the secondary literature. For clarity's sake, I shall refer to this concern about the higher types' attitude toward death as AD, for short.

¹ Brian Lightbody, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, Canada. E-mail: blightbody@brocku.ca

² Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 115-122)

This is an open access article licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits use, distribution, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2025 The Author. **The Agonist** is published by Transnational Press London.



There is, however, a more glaring second problem. Leiter (and others) often present the above character traits of the higher types as static, objective qualities.³ That is to say, the traits of higher types are examined from a diagnostic third-person perspective. This is problematic for two reasons. First, the basic tokens of Nietzsche's philosophical psychology are drives.⁴ Given a dispositional account, drives have various qualities, such as their capacity to make objects salient.⁵ The most crucial of these aspects, however, is their urge-like quality, which impels subjects as bearers of drives to satisfy the drive's impulse. Thus, drives are inherently dynamic entities. However, if that's right, then a diagnostic approach cannot, by its very nature, delve into the internal dynamism of the strong types' psyches, leaving us not only with an incomplete but also inaccurate picture of their psychology. Indeed, one might go further and suggest that the language of finding descriptive characteristics of higher types falsifies this elite group's unique psychical constitution in that we are thinking of them as substance-like things when they are more accurately described as forces of nature.⁶

What I propose is to examine the internal workings of the higher types' thought processes (which, it is crucial to remember, are but a reflection of their drive composition) by using AD as a secret psychic tunnel of sorts. Consider that, if higher types are likened to "citadels" as Nietzsche mentions in BGE 26, due to their unique drive structure—both in terms of the vitality of individual drives along with their organization—then death is one of the only common channels between them and weaker types.⁷ Understanding stronger types' attitude toward death, per se, and their own personal death might provide additional insight into how they live.

To capture the internal cognitive and affective landscapes of the higher types I employ Michel Foucault's term 'technology of the self'. For Foucault, a key component of understanding the relationship one has to oneself (*rapport à soi*) is to comprehend what an individual says (or does not say) to themselves, thinks (or does not think) about themselves, and does (or does not do) to themselves. Foucault claims that modern Western ethical thought has paid very little attention to the "how" of ethics, namely, the methods of self-improvement (technologies of the self) that a subject must put into practice in order to achieve ethical improvement.⁸ I use the French term *rapport à soi* to identify the meaning

³ See Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, London: Routledge, 1983, Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985, Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality* Oxford Clarendon Press, 1999. Brian Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), Leiter, Brian. 2002. *Nietzsche on Morality*. New York: Routledge, Brian Leiter, "Nietzsche's Theory of the Will", *Philosopher's Imprint*, Vol. 7 No. 7, 2007 1-15 and Brian Leiter, *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche*, Oxford University Press, 2019

⁴ Paul Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology". In K. Gemes and J. Richardson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2013, 726–55

⁵ Mattia Riccardi, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

⁶ Cf. GM II 17. See Nietzsche's discussion on how language vulgarizes in TI Skirmishes 26.

⁷ There would be other somatic commonalities obviously between higher and weaker types, but it is important to note that Nietzsche often stresses the physiological differences between the two. Consider TI 1 the Four Great Errors and Nietzsche's commentary on Comaro's diet, or GM I: 6, where Nietzsche discusses the need of the first priestly societies to develop stringent diets.

⁸ Foucault mentions four aspects of ethics in "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress" in *The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow New York, 1990, 352-366. These four are: 1. Ethical Substance – Aphrodisia This is what part of the self or behavior is being morally worked on—what the ethical subject is trying to govern or transform. 2. Mode of Subjection – How one recognizes and binds oneself to a moral code. This refers to how the individual comes to recognize



Foucault has given this term in his series of final works dedicated to the care of the self.⁹ In attempting to view the peculiar psychical constitution of the higher types from a second-person perspective now operationalized as a technology of the self and connecting this to AD, I argue that it is the strong type's recognition and acceptance of the first terrible truth of existence (i.e., death and dying) that distinguishes them from the weak, life-denying individual. In examining the higher types' attitude when facing their impending death (in both a literal and symbolic sense) as a vibrant technology of self, we not only gain a deeper understanding of their unique psychological profile (their *rapport à soi*) but also find something transposable in their attitude toward death and dying that weaker types might utilize to affirm our own mortal lives.

My essay is divided into three sections. In Section 1, I examine the relationship between weak characters and death, specifically their beliefs and needs for an afterlife. In examining the character profile of the weak as those who generally need illusion and falsification, the litmus test for the higher individual character type comes into sharper focus. In section 2, I demonstrate that the more an individual can accept the first terrible truth of existence as it pertains to death and dying, the stronger they are, according to Nietzsche. Unlike Leiter, I demonstrate that there is a need to distinguish between two aspects of the first terrible truth: accepting truths per se (e.g., death understood here as total and irrevocable annihilation as an undeniable fact of human existence) and being truthful toward oneself (e.g., in relation to the process of dying). In Section 3, the final part of the paper, I examine *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (especially "Of Voluntary Death") and aphorism 36 of the chapter "Skirmishes of an Untimely One" from *Twilight of the Idols*, passages where Nietzsche discusses knowing when to die at the right time. In connecting these analyses, specifically the relationship between higher types and dying, two components of the strong kind of technology of the self come to light: a descriptive part and a normative aspect. Dealing with the descriptive component first, higher types do not dwell on death but focus on achieving their overarching life goal. From a normative perspective, higher types should invigorate their relationship to life by practicing a consummating death, which Nietzsche defines in part as knowing when to die. I demonstrate that such a consummating death is a technology of self because it is a practice of truthfulness. There are two components at play in this regard. First, higher types must recognize when they can no longer practice (or have great difficulty in practicing) their life's work due to their impending death, either literal or symbolically construed. Second, following Paul Katsafanas, in reflecting on their capacities, higher types must examine their practical and epistemic commitments to achieving their life's goal. Finally, from this analysis, one gains a much better insight into the psychic inner workings of higher types, but may also adopt these ways of relating to death as technologies of the self.

a moral obligation—how they relate to the moral codes they follow. 3. Ascetic Practices – Technologies of the self. These are the practices and techniques by which one shapes oneself ethically. 4. Telos – The ethical goal or ideal self. This is the end goal of ethical work—what kind of person one is trying to become.

⁹ See the following works for a brief introduction to the notion of the term: Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" Also see "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" and "An Aesthetics of Existence" in *The Foucault Reader* edited by Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon Books, 1990. Also see Foucault <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en/>

Section 1: The Weak and Falsification

Nietzsche's remarks on the connection between the life-denying or weak sort of individual and the propensity to believe in an afterlife are scattered throughout his *oeuvre* from the middle to late works. Although such passages come from different periods of Nietzsche's philosophical development, there is remarkable consistency in relation to them, namely that the afterlife is an example of falsification which the weak need in order to make life bearable. Passages stemming from *Daybreak* (72), *The Anti-Christ* (15, 17, 29-34, 40-42), *Twilight of the Idols* (Expeditions of an Untimely Man, 26-43), *Zarathustra* (Part 1 Of the Backworldsmen, Part 1 On the Afterworldly, Part II Vision and Enigma, The Drunken Song, Part II The Soothsayer), *The Gay Science* (278, 341, 365, 94) *Beyond Good and Evil* (45) and all throughout the *Genealogy* all confirm this claim. The list is by no means exhaustive. In summarizing the upshot of these passages, we can safely say that the perceived need of those to believe their life will continue as an immortal phantom existing in "...the backworld—with its gray, frosty, unending mists and shadow..." is a clear symptom of a declining mode of life for Nietzsche (HH Vol II. 212 Happiness of the Historian trans. Hollingdale). The belief in life after death, in whatever religious form, is a resounding example of the kind of tartuffery and illusion required by those who find this mortal life too unbearable to endure without delusion. Such individuals, therefore, require and seek out various forms of religious escapism when it comes to confronting the unavoidable: death.

Let's zoom in and examine two passages that make this case stronger. It is in sections 15-17 of *The Anti-Christ* where Nietzsche explicitly makes the connection between the belief in an afterlife (at least from the Christian point of view) and one's physiological and psychological profile (which makes such a belief system both possible and necessary). Nietzsche writes: "In Christianity neither morality nor religion comes into contact with reality at any point. Nothing but imaginary causes (God, soul, ego, spirit, free will or unfree will: nothing but imaginary effects sin, redemption, grace, punishment, forgiveness of sin)" (AC 15 Trans. Hollingdale).

Later in the same section Nietzsche begins to establish a formula to explain the connection between the need for falsehood and weakness. He writes: "Who alone has reason to *lie to himself* out of actuality? He who *suffers* from it. But to suffer from actuality means to be an abortive actuality...such a preponderance, however, provides the formula for decadence. (AC 15, Trans. Hollingdale)

In AC 17 Nietzsche then provides perhaps the clearest formulation of the cause of decadence in his *oeuvre*: "Wherever the will to power declines in any form there is every time also a physiological regression, a *decadence*." (AC 17, Nietzsche's italics, Trans. Hollingdale) Unlike many other aphorisms, the passages have a clear message: those who require lies reflect a constitution that represents a declining mode of life. The connection between the need for illusions and decadence is obvious, but what about the opposite relationship, namely that between the acceptance of truth and the strength of spirit? As I demonstrate in the next section, Nietzsche provides clues as to how a life-affirming individual responds to such situations, thereby offering insight into life-affirming individuals in general.

Commented [AK1]: This is oddly worded own posthumous ambitions. Are you suggest thought of himself as a weaker type? There are in his writings where one could get this impression want to make sure that that's what you mean.

Commented [BL2R1]: Agreed. My revision my intent.



Section 2: Recognition of Reality

What attitude toward death symbolizes strength according to Nietzsche? I will argue that just as the need for delusion and falsification are symptoms of a declining life, so too the capacity to accept, what Brian Leiter has called “the terrible truths of existence”, are markers of the strong type of individual. As Nietzsche explains:

“Yes to reality, is just as necessary for the strong as cowardice and the flight from reality—as the ideal is for the weak, who are inspired by weakness.” (EH “The Birth of Tragedy”, 2, Trans. Kaufmann)

Other passages that mark the separation between strong and weak types as the capacity to recognize, when required, the unvarnished harsh truths of existence are BGE 244, GM I 10-13 and 16-17, [TI Morality as Anti-Nature, 5], and perhaps most importantly for my purposes, BGE 39, a seminal passage to which I will return. I claim that “when required”, because one of the critical aspects that marks a higher type’s psychological profile from the weak’s (in addition to lack of need for delusion) is their “love of life”, an instinct not to dwell on their inevitable demise, a claim supported by GS 278 and D 72; two key passages to which I will return below.

Turning now to the positive attributes of the higher types, to be sure, the assertion that there is a correlation between the acceptance of ugly, unforgiving truths and the strong, life-affirming, choice type of individual Nietzsche lauds is well-documented in the secondary literature.¹⁰ Although there are different ways in which the “affirmation of reality” is construed, nevertheless, this basic claim seems to be a standard criterion in demarcating the weak from the strong type according to Nietzsche.¹¹ The question to ask is whether we can distill the disparate expositions of the higher type of individual in the literature to a few central aspects. I believe that the higher type’s relation to death is one way to filter these discussions into a coalescence.

In order to clarify the psychological profile of the higher type, we need two things: what precisely are these terrible truths of existence that make life-affirmation both difficult to achieve and therefore laudatory, and a specific passage from Nietzsche’s *oeuvre* that might serve as a hermeneutic touchstone that clarifies the relationship between reality recognition and the strong type.

Turning to the second component first, BGE 39 provides us with such a criterion. I quote the passage in full:

Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous to the highest degree. Indeed, it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the “truth” one could still barely endure—or to put it

¹⁰ Brian Leiter, “Perspectivism in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals” In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Ed.) Richard Schacht, 1994 pp. 334-357. Brian Leiter, 2007, 2018, 2019. Lawrence Hatab, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, 2008. Paul Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzsche’s Constitutivism* Oxford University Press, 2013. Paul Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency and the Unconscious*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹¹ Although scholars disagree on what Reality is and how to interpret the object correctly, the weak rely on illusions, deception, and lies, and thus misinterpret the object. (Leiter, 1994, 346). “The first is that the fanatic is deficient in his capacity to be truthful with himself.” 152. Paul Katsafanas, “The Fanatic and the Last Man”, *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Volume 53, Issue 2, Autumn 2022, pp. 137-162.

Commented [AK3]: You’ve referenced numbers from *Twilight of the Idols* without a name. Without it, there is no way of knowing you mean.

Commented [BL4R3]: Corrected

more clearly, to what degree one would require it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified. (BGE 39 Trans. Kaufmann).

This passage gives us a clue about the kind of terrible truths of existence and how the degree to which one can accept them, unadulterated, is a reflection of one's character. Turning now to the first issue, i.e. what are these terrible truths of existence, I now wish to explore these especially as they connect to death. We may gain a better purchase of the term by turning to Brian Leiter. In his seminal article, "The Truth is Terrible," Leiter outlines three aspects of nature's horrific essence. The three truths are 1) ineliminable and inexhaustible existential suffering, such as physical and psychological pain; 2) Terrible moral truths about the universe and Life itself, namely that both are essentially amoral and 3) terrible epistemic truths, such as the falsifications that are inexorably infused into our very cognitive makeup that are required in order to navigate the world around us (e.g. that objects are solid, there are absolute physical laws, that we have free will etc.).¹² Upon closer examination of these horrifying facts, I divide the first truth into two. Perhaps the most obvious truth of existence pertains to our individual deaths—a fact that certainly we become aware of early on in life, whether we witness a beloved pet or grandparent die. The first terrible truth, then, is the recognition of the reality of death *per se* (what Nietzsche refers to as "definitive death" in D 72) for all living things, including most disconcertingly ourselves.

But there is another terrible truth related to death that I argue is more significant: just as death brings an ending to life, it is often the case that great physical pain (and psychological suffering) will precede our final demise. As the old saying goes, it is not death that's hard, but the dying. To be clearer, it is the recognition that my death (and the death of those I care about) will likely be accompanied by impending health crises of various sorts, excruciating pain, and, perhaps most importantly for Nietzsche, the diminution of our powers, energy, *joie de vivre*, in sum, our desire to self-overcome. As Nietzsche explains through the voice of Zarathustra: "There are the 'living dead,' those who avoid the demands of existence through escape into work and through renunciation of life. Many die too late, and a few die too early. The doctrine still sounds strange: 'Die at the right time!'" (Z, Of Voluntary Death, Trans. Hollingdale).

By looking at death through the lens of the strong type of individual, two significant aspects of this psychical profile come into sharper focus: 1. Nietzsche provides clues as to the psychical inner workings of the life-affirming individual. From these clues, I plan to reconstruct the strong type's attitude toward death from a first-person perspective. 2. We can exploit the strong attitude toward death as a technology of the self in Foucault's terms, thereby providing us with tools we can utilize in the face of the sometimes oppressive thoughts of our own death, the act of dying, and therefore the philosophy of living.

Section 3: Dying at the right time

Higher types affirm life and should not (and do not) often think of death, according to Nietzsche, but when they do, they should know when to die at the right time. This claim may be divided into two parts: 1) higher types do not perseverate on their

Commented [AK5]: Again, I'm not seeing writings. There is 'The Antichrist' where he talks about aristocrats don't have a right to be unhappy, but I think he means that these are the equivalent of his higher types.

Commented [BL6R5]: I have added additional text to the claim. I grant that my case is circumstantial.

¹² Brian Leiter, JOURNAL OF NIETZSCHE STUDIES, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2018 "The Truth Is Terrible", 151-173, 151-154



impending death and, more importantly, the nature of death (metaphysically construed) *per se*; instead, they focus on self-fashioning and overcoming, typically in relation to what they perceive as their destiny according to Nietzsche (EH: “Why I am so Clever” 9, Skirmishes 44, WP: 944, 962) and what Zarathustra calls their “consummating truth”. 2) Because they are capable of viewing even the harshest truths of reality (see EH, “Birth of Tragedy”, 2 and BGE 39 above), higher types are adept at knowing when they no longer have the capacity to affirm life nor pursue their overarching life project. Although there is no direct evidence for the first claim, I wish to make a case, though circumstantially warranted, that supports it. My argument can be corroborated by connecting three passages and providing a brief case study:

I will deal with the first part of the claim, which establishes, albeit only implicitly, that higher individuals are too busy fulfilling their destiny to contemplate death in any sustained way. It is in GS 278, where Nietzsche praises those who are “drunk with life.” Although there isn’t a line in the text that directly implies there is a distinction between types of persons who ruminate on death and those who focus on extracting every ounce out of living, according to Michael Ure’s interpretation, the sorts of people Nietzsche is commending in this passage are the ones who are “thirsty” and do not dwell on death. As Ure interprets the section, “Nietzsche applauds their refusal to meditate on death because to do so is to become aware of their shared fate as mortals, of the fact that ‘death and deathly silence are the only things common to all in this future!’”¹³ To recognize their singularity, higher individuals instinctively refrain from thinking about death, as doing so has both a leveling effect, reducing them to the common, and more importantly, diminishes their good cheer—“darkens the sky” and stills “their active hand.” (D 41).

The main takeaway from the above sections, or so I now argue, is that dwelling on death as a distinct state from that of living would be an unwelcome intrusion, diverting the higher types’ singular focus on achieving their overarching life project and, above all, the suffering and self-overcoming necessary to accomplish it. But why is death an intrusion and not an inspiration? Daybreak 72 helps to answer this question, or so I now argue. Although there are many avenues one might follow in this incredibly “pregnant passage” as Rempel Morgan points out in his insightful article, “Daybreak 72: Nietzsche, Epicurus, and the after Death”, one that has been insufficiently explored is the danger of focusing on “the nothing” that is death, *per* Epicurus.

Unlike some other philosophers, Nietzsche’s praise for Epicurus remains consistent throughout his *oeuvre*. Importantly, Nietzsche lauds the atomist’s *tetra pharmakos*, specifically the second teaching which states that one should not fear death (because “death is nothing to us”) for its medicinal, “soul-soothing” properties in works like the Wanderer and his Shadow (see WS 7) and the Anti-Christ (AC 58).¹⁴ But what exactly makes the statement a form of medicine, or more properly, a hygiene—a warning to avoid perseverating on death? To answer this, we must return to Epicurus himself:

¹³ Michael Ure, “Nietzsche’s Ethics of Self-Cultivation and Eternity” *Ethics and Self-Cultivation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018), 4.

¹⁴ “When we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living it is not and the dead exist no longer.” Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus, trans. Robert Drew Hicks, in *The Epicurus Reader*, ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 28–31.

42 *Truthful Dying: Illuminating the Higher Types' Attitude Toward Literal and Symbolic Death*

...therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life an unlimited time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. For life has no terror; for those who thoroughly apprehend that there are no terrors for them in ceasing to live. Foolish, therefore, is the person who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the prospect. (Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*)

Epicurean philosophy counsels not to think of death as separate from life, but rather to enfold it into one's approach to living. In doing so, we fashion a more joyful, meaningful life that allows us to get on with valuing what makes life worthwhile, namely, living well (*eu zen*).

Turning now to D 72, Nietzsche adds both a political and psychological gloss to Epicurus' wise teaching, further demonstrating the dangers of thinking too hard about death. Politically speaking, by not focusing on living well and in particular by not having an overarching goal or plan for one's life leaves one susceptible to those who have a plan for us: the proselytizers and grifters who then use the "nothingness of death" (a blank artistic slate) as an opportunity to instill their followers with both hope via the prospect of immortal life but also fear due to imaginary subterranean terrors (e.g. lakes of fire and tormenting demons) from which only they offer redemption—all for a price, of course, cashed out in life-denying practices. As Nietzsche perceptively proclaims: "Christianity took the belief in these subterranean terrors, which was already dying out, under its especial protection, and it acted prudently in so doing!... (D 72, Trans. Hollingdale)

Psychologically, Nietzsche remarks that those who are fearful, herd-like, resentful, and rebuke the hardships of life are the most vulnerable to fall under the spell of the priests: the peddlers of false ideas and imaginary causes. He observes, "It (Christianity) thereby brought the timorous over to its side—the firmest adherents of a new faith! (D 72 Trans. Hollingdale). But why would the timorous be more likely to become Christian rather than the initiates of other mystery cults of the period like Isis and Mithras? The answer is that the timorous, who are likely enslaved people in Ancient Rome, are impotent. However, what Christianity eventually comes to offer—more than any other mystery cult—is a complete cathartic release to such emotionally and physically traumatized people. For Christianity preaches the apocalyptic return of the Kingdom of God, which not only permits but endorses "...the weak and bedraggled to take delight in the suffering of their erstwhile oppressors."¹⁵ Such an insatiable, vengeful, purely fantastical apocalyptic vision, like that of Tertullian's (See GM I 15) offers, in the words of Lawrence Hatab, a mode of life that is "agonistically unnatural" and therefore to be avoided at all costs as it is discordant to the structure of self-overcoming itself.¹⁶

Finally, I turn to a case study—a rhetorical device that Nietzsche, *qua* cultural physician, was particularly fond of using.¹⁷ To corroborate my analysis, consider Napoleon (a surrogate for a Nietzschean higher type) who, when writing to General Lauriston noted: "Death is nothing, but to live defeated is to die every day." Thus, the capacity, when appropriate, to forget—a great power which Nietzsche reminds us in GM II: 1 is not the

¹⁵ Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche's On The Genealogy of Morals*, 48.

¹⁶ Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals and introduction*, 66.

¹⁷ See Daniel Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* and Ric S.J. Brown "Nietzsche that Profound Physiologist"



mere negation of remembering—to forget death and dying, is a technology of the self in the Foucauldian sense as it pertains to what we do not (often) say or think to ourselves.

What about when death is near? When even a higher type cannot help but think of their impending demise, whether because of old age, illness, or a dangerous undertaking? What should a higher type say or do to themselves when confronting their own mortality, or even worse, when facing the symbolic death of their being, namely their *rapport à soi*? I wish to examine this question by first turning to *Twilight* section Skirmishes 36, where, if the passage is taken out of context and read separately from what Nietzsche says in *Zarathustra*, we might see Nietzsche as an early advocate of Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) for similar reasons to those proposed by the Death with Dignity advocates of the late and early 20th century.¹⁸ After offering this tempting interpretation, I connect this passage to chapters in *Zarathustra*. In doing so, a more comprehensive and nuanced discussion of Nietzsche's views on dying emerges. Finally, I demonstrate what might be salvageable from this discussion as a technology of the self for Nietzsche's 'lesser types'.

First turning to *Twilight* Skirmishes 36, Nietzsche declares: "To die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death of one's own free choice, death at the proper time, with a clear head and with joyfulness consummated in the midst of children and witnesses: so that an actual leaving-taking is possible while who is leaving is *still there*, likewise an actual evaluation of what has been desired and what achieved in life, an *adding-up* of life... (TI Skirmishes 36, Nietzsche's *Italics* Trans. Hollingdale). Nietzsche's discussion, at first glance, appears to align with recent legislation in Western countries and parts of the United States that supports the concept of Death with Dignity. Indeed, the most common justifications cited for supporting a Death with Dignity Act (DWDA) in the United States have been the principles of autonomy. As Simmons notes in his article "Death with Dignity": "'Losing autonomy' is the most cited reason for DWDA patients to choose PAS: 91% of Oregonian respondents in poll and 87% of Washingtonian respondents named it a concern."¹⁹ At face value, this passage would affirm one of the principal reasons people give for PAS: dying when one is "still there," as Nietzsche puts it.

No doubt, being present cognitively speaking with enough mental acuity to decide when one dies, is probably at least one of the concerns Nietzsche has in mind when advocating for a death at the right time in *Twilight* Skirmishes 36. However, it is, in the words of Stephen Darwall, a reason of the wrong kind—Nietzsche would likely argue that such an individual still dies too late. Thus, although Nietzsche's passage seemingly offers reasons given for PAS in a Western industrial setting, such a tempting interpretation doesn't quite hit the mark. As I will demonstrate, it is not so much the loss of autonomy, perhaps inflicted by advanced dementia or Alzheimer's, that would make a higher type a candidate for PAS, according to Nietzsche, but rather whether the higher type is no longer able to affirm life, which may be translated as the inability to endorse and live their *consummating* truth. To elucidate what I take this consummating truth to be, I now explain two primary considerations at play, which may at times but only contingently so, graph onto psychical and psychological debilitating conditions. Essentially, these two conditions

¹⁸ Simmons KM. Suicide and Death with Dignity. *J Law Biosci*. 2018 May 15;5(2):436-439. doi: 10.1093/jlb/lsy008. PMID: 30191072; PMCID: PMC6121057

¹⁹ Simmons, 436.

are an inability to recognize and continue living a fundamental truth of one's existence (e.g. some overarching goal that a higher type instinctually takes to be their life's work) and being truthful to oneself (e.g. that one cannot find another worthy goal to live for given that one is dying either literally or symbolically understood).

When does one know when the right time is? What does it mean to die when one is "still there"? To answer this part, it is understanding when to commit to the consummating death that is significant. Rempel Morgan spells this out in his article: "Dying at the Right Time." He argues that Nietzsche wished his readers to recognize when it was time to die, because doing so would help them realize their goal. As Morgan quotes from *Zarathustra*: "I shall show you the consummating death, which shall be a spur and a promise to the living. The man consummating his life dies his death triumphantly, surrounded by men filled with hope and making solemn vows. Thus one should learn to die: and there should be no festivals at which such a dying man does not consecrate the oaths of the living! To die thus is the best death."²⁰

Notice that a good death for Nietzsche presupposes that one take on a burden larger than oneself, one of the fundamental aspects Leiter attributed to higher types. However, to have a goal external to oneself presupposes a special internal relationship one has for achieving that goal. For example, what will be sacrificed? How much of my day will be spent pursuing the goal? Is the goal worth risking my health or even life to attain it? These are considerations that, given the drive makeup of the higher type, are rarely asked. They become relevant once a strong type's organization of drives, which platforms their abundant energy and resoluteness, is in a state of disarray. At this point, or so I shall now argue, the need to be truthful, if it is still present, comes into play. This internal attitude requires reflection on one's perhaps waning energy, cognitive abilities, and lassitude in relation to pursuing one's life's work, as well as one's current state of physical suffering. In short, a recognition of one's failing commitment—a recognition not of losing one's mental acuity *per se*, but rather a truthful assessment that one's best days, as measured in pursuit of one's overarching life-purpose, are over. As Nietzsche puts it: "In your death, your spirit and your virtue should still glow like a sunset glow around the earth: otherwise yours is a bad death. Thus I want to die myself." (*Z*, Of Voluntary Death, Trans. Hollingdale) Such a truth is terrible, perhaps even more terrible than death itself, because it is recognition of the slow annihilation of a *great self*: a self who was strong, perpetually overcoming obstacles, affirming the essence of life, which, as Nietzsche reminds us in BGE 260, is will to power. It is, in short, the death of the great person's *rapport à soi*.

What sort of *rapport à soi* does a higher type have? Is it possible to see the unique relationship a higher type has to themselves from the inside? Paul Katsafanas has recently explored the internal recognition of greatness, and the subsequent need for single-minded commitment to express it, in his recent work, "The Fanatic and the Last Man." Katsafanas examines individuals who display extreme integrity and unwavering commitment to challenging goals—figures like Martin Luther, Antigone, and Thomas More, historical (and fictional) figures who would not be thought of as exceptional in any other way. However, he also demonstrates that Napoleon and Goethe, two individuals often considered to be of a higher type by Nietzsche, share internal psychic qualities with such individuals.

²⁰ Morgan Rempel, "Dying at the Right Time." *Philosophy Now*, 2009.



Although there are significant psychic differences between a Martin Luther on the one hand and a Beethoven on the other, it cannot be understated that they share the following characteristics: total psychic unity (there is never a trace of cognitive dissonance), a conviction of their purpose and a resoluteness in relation to this purpose that requires them to sacrifice personal comfort without hesitation or regret. To characterize their psychic profiles, Katsafanas shows that such individuals maintain a sense of commitment to their life mission across two key dimensions: practical and epistemic. In terms of the practical, they are fully motivated and unconflicted, able to persevere through adversity with intense focus. Epistemically, they are certain of the rightness of their values, either through unreflective conviction or reflective confidence.²¹ In considering these two components, the *rapport à soi* takes on shape: higher types demonstrate an unwavering commitment to their life's work, despite the many obstacles they face, and secondly, they have an instinctive, unquestionable regard for its importance.

With a glimpse into the internal perception of the inner workings of a higher type, we can bring this component together with the idea discussed earlier of a consummating death. In doing so, we create a snapshot of the strong type's internal psychic machinery in relation to either their impending physical or symbolic death. First, it is clear that an overarching, unwavering commitment to truthfulness is required in order for a higher type to die as they should, according to Nietzsche. What does such a zealous commitment to truthfulness entail? Firstly, one must be truthful with oneself in two regards: 1. Have I achieved my life's mission? 2. Are my abilities, energy, and drive waning, such that I am like "dead branches that yet cling to a tree," making it unlikely I will accomplish my goal, were I to continue to live? (Zarathustra, Of Voluntary Death Trans. Hollingdale) In short, is now the time to pass on my goals and aims to a suitable heir?

These questions, if genuinely asked, either lead to one of two paths: the higher type answers affirmatively, namely their resoluteness and commitment to their overarching goals remains steadfast and they find new resources to recommit to their life work (like Beethoven who improvised new ways to compose music after becoming deaf) or else they die, voluntarily at the right time, "hanging up no more weathered wreaths in the sanctuary of life" (Zarathustra Of Voluntary Death, Trans. Hollingdale).

To conclude, we might ask perhaps the most important question of this inquiry regarding the first-person perspective on death and dying of the higher types: Can we, assuming that we are lesser types, find something transposable from this investigation? Three lessons come to mind. First, it is crucial to find an overarching goal that allows us to focus on living rather than dwelling on death. Second, we must reassess our commitment to this goal as a daily exercise, given that we may not have the instinctual resources of a higher type. We must strive to identify the mental, emotional, and conative resources necessary to support this commitment. The third lesson is perhaps the most depressing: given that the basic components of Nietzsche's philosophical psychology are drives and that drives platform all thought processes (GS 354), the above recommendations may be a moot point. For some scholars, our present psychological constitution is inevitable, as we are nothing more than avatars of our type.²² My only response to that depressing possibility is to respond, as Nietzsche does to those who

²¹ Katsafanas, 2022, 138.

²² See Leiter, 2007, 2019.

Commented [AK9]: Unclear. Do you mean continue to live?

Commented [BL10R9]: Yes.

Commented [AK11]: Is this what you mean?

Commented [BL12R11]: Yes.

believe the English psychologists are cold, tedious frogs: "I rebel at that idea; more I do not believe it and if one may be allowed to hope where one does not know, then I hope from my heart it is the reverse of this!" (GM I:1, Trans. Kaufmann).

References

- Ahern, Daniel. *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University State Press, 1995.
- Brown, Richard, S.G. "Nietzsche: That Profound Physiologist." *Nietzsche and Science* Ed(s) Gregory Moore and Thomas Brobjer Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2004.
- Conway, Daniel. *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals: A Reader's Guide*. Lanham Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.
- Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus, trans. Robert Drew Hicks, in *The Epicurus Reader*, ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 28–31.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader* edited by Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.
- Hatab, Lawrence. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Commentary*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Janaway, Christopher. *Beyond Selflessness*, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Katsafanas, Paul. "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology". In K. Gemes and J. Richardson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2013, 726–55.
- Katsafanas, Paul. *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzsche's Constitutivism* Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Katsafanas, Paul. *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency and the Unconscious*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Leiter, Brian. "The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 219.
- Leiter, Brian. 2002. *Nietzsche on Morality*. New York: Routledge.
- Leiter, Brian. Nietzsche's Theory of the Will", *Philosopher's Imprint*, Vol. 7 No. 7, 2007 1-15.
- Leiter, Brian. "The Truth is Terrible. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2018, 151-173.
- Leiter, Brian. *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche*, Oxford University Press, 2019.
- May, Simon. *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality* Oxford Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, Trans.r. J. hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1982.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1966.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1966.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. by R.J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1975.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Will to Power". In *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R., J. Hollingdale, with an introduction by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1968.
- Riccardi, Mattia. *Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Rempel, Morgan (2009) "Dying at the Right Time." *Philosophy Now*. https://philosophynow.org/issues/76/Dying_At_The_Right_Time
- Rempel, Morgan. "Daybreak 72: Nietzsche, Epicurus, and the after Death" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* Vol. 43 No. 2 Autumn 2012, 342-354.
- Schacht, Richard. *Nietzsche*, London: Routledge, 1983.
- Simmons KM. Suicide and Death with Dignity. *J Law Biosci*. 2018 May 15;5(2):436-439. doi: 10.1093/jlb/lsy008. PMID: 30191072; PMCID: PMC6121057
- Ure, Michael. "Nietzsche's Ethics of Self-Cultivation and Eternity" *Ethics and Self-Cultivation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018).

