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Nietzsche's Philosophy of Conflict and the Logic of Organisational Struggle

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CHAPTER 1

NIETZSCHE *CONTRA* AGONISM

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In today's predominantly liberal climate, it comes very naturally to us to read Nietzsche as fundamentally opposed to murderous forms of conflict; and certainly, throughout his oeuvre, he repeatedly articulates a preference for measured, productive forms of struggle (what he calls “Wettkampf” or “Agon”) over and against those of a more destructive ilk. Texts expressing this idea, particularly CV 5, have recently been placed centre stage not only within Nietzsche scholarship, but also beyond, in liberal-democratic appropriations of his thought in political theory.¹ As these readers often point out, Nietzsche's antipathy towards destructive conflict manifests itself at both a physical and intellectual or spiritual level insofar as he censures both murderous struggle and the analogous silencing or exclusion of *geistige* adversaries (which we will be considering in Chapter 4). In this chapter, however, I will be specifically focussing on Nietzsche's philosophical stance toward *physically* destructive, inter-human conflict (hereafter referred to as PDC). This encompasses any struggle that is driven by the desire to physically exterminate one's opponent – what Nietzsche calls *Vernichtungslust*. Under this rubric, I will be

¹ On this trend, see ch.2.

considering everything from individual cases of murder and attempted murder, up to and including large-scale military conflicts.²

The tendency to read Nietzsche as a primarily agonistic philosopher, hostile to PDC, can be viewed as continuing the legacy left by Walter Kaufmann's concerted attempt to render Nietzsche's thought palatable to modern liberal readers. According to Kaufmann's pioneering interpretation, Nietzsche maintained that

the barbarian's desire to torture his foe can be sublimated into the desire to defeat one's rival, say, in the Olympic contests; it can even be sublimated into the rivalry of the tragedians who vie with each other for the highest prize, or into the efforts of a Plato to write more beautifully than the poets – and the entire Socratic dialectic could be construed as a sublimation of the same ancient striving to overwhelm one's foe.³

As we saw in the Introduction, Kaufmann then makes the further claim that Nietzsche only promotes martial conflict “metaphorical[ly]”, that is, as a means to promoting *spiritual* struggle.⁴ The key idea running through Kaufmann's exegesis is that Nietzsche sought a *transfiguration* of destructive conflict into measured intellectual modes of opposition. In the same vein, Lawrence Hatab has defended the general claim that Nietzsche does not espouse “eliminative destruction” but rather a “creative, agonistic” form of negation “that advances *over* something without annihilating it.”⁵ This is a prime example of the so-called “soft” reading of Nietzsche on conflict, which constitutes the main target of the current chapter. Christa Davis Acampora's Nietzsche, though perhaps not as “soft” as Hatab's, is

² It is acknowledged that war may not always destroy the opponent *absolutely* insofar as it often aims at the submission rather than the obliteration of the opposed military force. Nonetheless, as an activity, it consists of a multitude of smaller scale murderous engagements (battles). Indeed, Nietzsche explicitly groups murder and war together under the heading of *Vernichtungskampf*. See e.g. CV 5 1.784-5. See also NL 1[34] 10.18: “Der Krieg als die erlaubte Form des Nachbar-Mordes.”

³ Kaufmann (1974), p.220.

⁴ Kaufmann (1974), p.386.

⁵ Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.63.

nonetheless a direct descendant of Kaufmann's Nietzsche – namely, insofar as she emphasises the transformative impulse that informs Nietzsche's stance on PDC: "From early in his career Nietzsche was interested in how human capacities for and tendencies toward aggression, struggle, and resistance could be channelled, sublimated, or redirected."⁶ The objective of the following chapter is to test the robustness of this cluster of related claims. I will contend that the "soft" agonistic reading has at best limited validity, since in both the early and the later works a) we find an ontology of PDC that, in certain cases, contradicts the possibility of agonistic transformation – i.e. he describes some PDC as a *necessary* and therefore, to some extent, *immutable* feature of human existence; and b) he can, under certain conditions, be said to valorise PDC. In this way, I will be arguing that he both describes and values PDC in a way that is incompatible with the agonistic reading.

This is by no means an unexplored theme. Nietzsche's normative stance towards PDC has already been the subject of much interpretive dispute. First, the agonistic readings of Nietzsche put forward by Kaufmann and his inheritors can be understood as both a critical backlash against earlier interpretations of Nietzsche as a proto-fascistic warmonger, as well as a positive effort to bring him into the liberal democratic fold.⁷ Yet, in CV 3 – part of the same collection of unpublished essays

⁶ Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), p.4.

⁷ See e.g. Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defence of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995). On the agonistic counter-argument to Fascist readings, see e.g. Keith Ansell-Pearson, who states that "The real problem with the labelling of Nietzsche as a Fascist, or worse, a Nazi, is that it ignores the fact that Nietzsche's aristocratism seeks to revive an older conception of politics, one which he locates in the Greek *agon*", see *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.33-4. Examples of readings of Nietzsche as a bellicose thinker can be found among his critics and supporters alike, see e.g. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.693; or Alfred Bäumler, *Nietzsche, der Philosoph und Politiker* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1931), pp.63ff. and pp.172ff.; Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (Munich: Piper, 1963), see esp. pp.533-4. For an overview of the extent to which Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche was responsible for propagating this image of her brother, see Christian Niemeyer, entry for "Krieg", in Christian Niemeyer (ed.), *Nietzsche-Lexikon* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), pp.186–90 (pp.188-9).

as CV 5 – Nietzsche presents us with a valorisation of war that would seem to lend at least some credibility to the interpretation of his thought as belligerently proto-fascist; furthermore, in MA, he repeatedly avows the socially beneficial effects of war; and later, in GM, in his notorious portrayal of the violent, pillaging blond beasts, he again appears to unscrupulously affirm PDC.⁸ While some cite these texts to present Nietzsche’s normative project as one brutally advocating PDC,⁹ his agonistic readers tend to disregard, if not consciously suppress, them.¹⁰

Drawing on these and other texts, I therefore propose to give a balanced reconstruction of Nietzsche’s affirmative thoughts on PDC. Aside from mediating between agonistic and militaristic (or radical aristocratic) interpretations, the original contribution of this chapter is its analysis of the different ontologies underpinning his multifarious stances towards PDC. It is worthwhile giving a brief précis of my critical exegesis. Thus, in Section 1, I focus on CV 3 in order to unpack Nietzsche’s early thoughts on PDC. I argue that he uses an amalgam of Aristotle’s notion of catharsis and Schopenhauerian metaphysics to generate an ontology of PDC according to which it is construed as the expression of an *essentially* destructive and unstoppably accreting drive or behavioural disposition. While we may be able to contain this impetus, it can neither be extinguished nor transformed – and if contained, it *demand*s raw periodic release. On these grounds, I maintain that in this early text Nietzsche presents PDC as a *metaphysical* necessity.

In Section 2, I make an inquiry into the non-metaphysical conceptions of PDC that he develops in the wake of his rejection of Schopenhauerian metaphysics. In doing so, I largely concentrate on Nietzsche’s middle period (though I also

⁸ GM I 11 5.275.

⁹ See e.g. Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999). Appel, speaking of Nietzsche’s “sympathetic account of [the] unleashing of murderous destruction” in GM I 11, asserts that “although the ‘blond beast’ is gone forever, Nietzsche appears intent on encouraging something like a modern analogue to his beast of prey-like ‘innocent conscience’” (p.147). Don Dombowsky draws on CV 3 to defend a militaristic vision of Nietzsche in *Nietzsche and Napoleon: The Dionysian Conspiracy* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014) (p.75), and *Nietzsche’s Machiavellian Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) (pp.89-96).

¹⁰ See e.g. Acampora (2013), who does not once refer to either CV 3 or GM I 11.

consider CV 5). I begin by outlining his rejection of metaphysics before briefly considering the model of agonal transformation that he constructs in CV 5 and MA. My reading brings into relief precisely how this model presupposes an ontology of PDC that contradicts the ontology developed in CV 3.¹¹ Despite this apparent shift to agonism, in latter half of this section, I argue that even in MA, Nietzsche vociferously praises war on account of the purely realist observation that it *stimulates* weary cultures.

In Section 3, I then turn to Nietzsche's later conception of PDC. I commence with an analysis of GM, which we will see betrays a brief reversion to the earlier cathartic model of PDC as a human necessity (though now purged of metaphysics). Nonetheless, I argue that we ought to treat this as an anomaly since, from 1881 onwards, Nietzsche's thought is rather dominated by a novel ontology of PDC. This ontology, which is informed by the scientific theory of Robert Mayer, will be seen to be perfectly compatible with Nietzsche's agonism insofar as it posits PDC as wholly transformable. I nonetheless conclude that, although Nietzsche does endorse agonism, and formulate an ontology of PDC that is coherent with this endorsement, there is sufficient counterevidence to reject the overgeneralising claim of his agonistic interpreters that Nietzsche should be read as antipathetic towards PDC.

¹¹ Unlike many of his interpreters, Nietzsche prefers the adjective "agonal" to that of "agonistic", and so in the context of his thought I will employ the former.

1.2. THE EARLY NIETZSCHE ON *VERNICHTUNGSKAMPF*

1.2.1. CATHARSIS, PURIFICATION AND DISCHARGE IN THE EARLY NIETZSCHE

In order to get a bearing on how Nietzsche's treatment of PDC can be understood in terms of catharsis, we should begin by outlining the various ways in which he conceptualises this process. The Greek noun "κάθαρσις", from which the English "catharsis" originates, is standardly glossed as "purification" or "cleansing"¹², or in German as "Reinigung".¹³ As well as signifying the quotidian act of washing oneself, it can also take on the metaphorical sense of religious purification, or the act of washing away one's sin.¹⁴ As we can see from Nietzsche's own analysis of cathartic religious rituals in his 1875 lectures on "Der Gottesdienst der Griechen" (GDG), this metaphorical use exhibits varying degrees of symbolism. Thus, it can be used to signify the literal washing of the hands before dinner prayers, or the washing of a murderer with holy water so as to cleanse them of contaminating miasma ["μίασμα"]); but it can also refer to the act of cleansing a place of worship with holy smoke ("Weihgerauch").¹⁵

There is then the medical signification of catharsis. According to Hippocratic medicine, the body is composed of four humours or fluids that must be kept in harmonious balance if the individual is to remain healthy. Catharsis refers to the process of purgation that must be undertaken should one of these humours reach

¹² See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), entry for "κάθαρσις" (p.851).

¹³ See Wilhelm Pape, *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache: Griechisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch* (Braunschweig: Vieweg & Sohn, 1914), vol.1, p.1282.

¹⁴ See Peter Thomas, "Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism: Catharsis", *Historical Materialism*, 17 (2009), 259-264 (p.259).

¹⁵ See GDG, KGW II/5, pp.504-11. See pp.504-14 for Nietzsche's treatment of catharsis.

a pathological excess in a particular part, or the whole, of the body.¹⁶ We might compare this to the English verb “to let” (e.g. in the sense of “bloodletting”). An excess of black bile was held to be particularly problematic, though it was believed that this could be purged through either the ingestion of a drug or the performance of certain religious rites.¹⁷

Finally, there is the aesthetic meaning, which we first find in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and which since then has been interpreted variously. Aristotle famously, yet ambiguously, theorised that one of the main functions of tragedy was to facilitate the catharsis of spectators’ feelings of fear and pity.¹⁸ Yet the brevity of Aristotle’s remarks, both in the *Poetics* and *Politics*, ignited a lengthy and on-going philological dispute. As it concerns us, this debate can be divided between the contrary interpretations of Lessing and Bernays. The former, in his *Hamburger Dramaturgie*, argues that tragic catharsis was a process by which passions undergo moral purification (“Reinigung”) and are thereby transformed into practical virtues.¹⁹ As an example, he draws on André Dacier’s hypothesis that going through the compassionate and fearful experience of watching a tragic character’s downfall renders the possibility of our being personally struck by similar misfortunes less fearsome: since we are acquainted with the possibility of such occurrences, their fear-inspiring element of surprise is undermined and we should be able to face them with greater fortitude should they actually come to pass. Thus, the outburst of

¹⁶ See also Liddell and Scott (1940) (p.851), who give a selection of references to the relevant places in Galen’s and Hippocrates’ works where this definition is evidently in play. See also Aristotle, *Problems*, 864b12-864b27, for evidence that Aristotle was well acquainted with this medical practice.

¹⁷ See Adnan K. Abdulla, *Catharsis in Literature* (Indiana: Indiana UP, 1985), p.14. See the entire of ch.1 of Abdulla’s analysis for an excellent survey of the historical meanings of catharsis.

¹⁸ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 49b27; see also Aristotle, *Politics*, 1341b20-1341b32 for a slightly more complete and politically relevant treatment of catharsis. All references to Aristotle are taken from Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Gotthold Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Stuttgart, G. J. Göschen, 1890), pt.LXXVIII (January 29, 1768), p.262.

emotion evoked by tragedy has the power to transfigure the foible of fear into the noble virtue of courage.²⁰

Jacob Bernays, however, takes issue with both the vagueness and philological inaccuracy of Lessing's exegesis. Through a close and historically contextualised reading of Aristotle, Bernays maintains that Aristotle's use of the term "catharsis" should instead be understood in relation to term's meaning within ancient Greek medicine.²¹ Bernays argues that when transferred from the medical into the psychological domain by Aristotle, the notion of catharsis nonetheless still implies the discharge ("Entladung"), but *not* transformation ("Verwandlung") or further suppression ("Zurückdrängung"), of a pathological accretion; however, now it is a case of an accretion of *affects* as opposed to humours.²² While the originality of his medical interpretation may be questionable, it was certainly influential insofar as it inaugurated the now commonplace translation of "κάθαρσις" as "Entladung".²³

There is strong evidence to suggest that Nietzsche was aware of, and adopted, Bernays' conception of catharsis. We find this in another lecture, namely, GGL, in which Nietzsche tells us that religious ceremonies could purge not just sin, but also overloaded affects. Through the performance of rhythmic music, the Greeks believed they could placate the gods by draining off their ferocity ("ferocia"); similarly, they were also of the conviction that art, by allowing a certain release, could be employed to regulate their own pathologically accreted affects ("krankhaft

²⁰ Ibid., p.261. N.B. Lessing also criticises Dacier for believing that this one example exhausted the meaning of dramatic catharsis.

²¹ Abdulla (1985) convincingly contests the originality of Bernays' medical interpretation (p.17).

²² Jacob Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie* (Breslau: E. Trewendt, 1857), p.144. Here he describes Aristotelian catharsis as "eine von Körperlichem auf Gemüthliches übertragene Bezeichnung für solche Behandlung eines Beklommenen, welche das ihn bleklemmende Element nicht zu verwandeln oder zurückzudrängen sucht, sondern es aufregen, hervortreiben und dadurch Erleichterung des Beklommenen bewirken will."

²³ On the issue of the originality of Bernays' interpretation, see fn.21. On Bernays' having established the standard translation of catharsis, see Glenn Most, "Nietzsche gegen Aristoteles mit Aristoteles", in Martin Vöhler and Dirck Linck (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Katharsis – Transformationen des aristotelischen Modells seit Bernays, Nietzsche und Freud* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), pp.51–62 (p.60).

gesteigerten Affekte”). In this way, tragedies, symposia and orgiastic cults would employ combinations of dramatic action, rhythmic music, or wine to induce a state of frenzy (“*Taumel*”) or excess (“*Übermaße*”), which would in turn enable a discharge (“*Entladung*”) of these affects, thereby restoring inner harmony and equilibrium (“*Gleichgewicht*”).²⁴ Thus, with his discussion of catharsis in terms of a raw or untransformed “*Entladung*”, and the lack of any mention of moral transformation, Nietzsche is ostensibly already operating with a Bernaysian conception of catharsis. The key features of this Bernaysian model of catharsis *qua* raw discharge can be summarised as follows:

1. An initial pathological accretion of an affect;
2. Stimulation or arousal of this affect to the point of excess;
3. The subsequent unrefined, raw discharge of this affect;
4. The final attainment of a healthy affective equilibrium.

From GT, we can also see that Nietzsche was keenly aware of the dispute between Bernays and Lessing, speaking directly of “*Jene pathologische Entladung, die Katharsis des Aristoteles, von der die Philologen nicht recht wissen, ob sie unter die medicinischen oder die moralischen Phänomene zu rechnen sei*” (GT 22 1.142). However, in contrast to the aforementioned adoption of Bernays’ exegesis in his lectures, here Nietzsche rejects *both* theories as insufficient *explanans* of the effect of tragedy. In GT 22, he describes these interpretations of tragedy as evidently *not* those of aesthetically attuned individuals. The true function of tragedy is, according to Nietzsche, its ability to grant its audience an invigorating insight into the dark, but nonetheless joyful, Dionysian nature of reality – that is, the primal unity of the world

²⁴ GGL, KGW II/5, pp.285-6: “Alle orgiastischen Culte haben den Sinn, die ferocia einer Gottheit auf Ein Mal zu entfesseln, damit sie uns nachher in Ruhe lasse [und] milde sei.” See also p.286: “Die kathart. Wirkung der Musik ist nun die, jene Entladung herbeizuführen, dadurch daß man die Seele schnell zu jenem trunkenen Übermaße führt.”

underlying individuated appearances. In EH, Nietzsche again reiterates his earlier criticism of Bernays' Aristotle, stating that people do not attend tragedies "um sich von einem gefährlichen Affekt durch dessen vehemente Entladung zu reinigen" but, rather, in order to be stimulated and to experience the pleasure of life even in the face of its strangest and most intractable problems (EH GT 3 6.312).

Notwithstanding these critical thoughts, the dynamic model of cathartic *Entladung*, as Glenn Most has demonstrated at length, recurs throughout GT.²⁵ Thus, Nietzsche claims that in spectating tragedy we can be said to satisfy our need to "entladen" our "musikalische Erregungen".²⁶ And moreover, the musical satyr chorus of early Greek tragedy – representative of the "Ureine", or noumenal world will underlying all appearance – is said to need to discharge ("entladen") itself in Apollonian images; indeed, it was this choral discharging that gave rise to the dialogue and stage action of tragedy.²⁷ As such, the full original title of GT, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, is only explicated by Nietzsche with reference to a model of energetic economy that replicates the structure of the Bernaysian model of catharsis. What has hitherto not been observed, and we should therefore now examine, is the way in which the influence of this model extends beyond Nietzsche's early reflections on aesthetics into his socio-political thought of the same period.

²⁵ See Most (2009), pp.60-2.

²⁶ See GT 24 1.49-50: "Wir hatten unter den eigenthümlichen Kunstwirkungen der musikalischen Tragödie eine apollinische Täuschung hervorzuheben, durch die wir vor dem unmittelbaren Einssein mit der dionysischen Musik gerettet werden sollen, während unsre musikalische Erregung sich auf einem apollinischen Gebiete und an einer dazwischengeschobenen sichtbaren Mittelwelt entladen kann."

²⁷ See GT 8 1.61-2: "Nach dieser Erkenntniss haben wir die griechische Tragödie als den dionysischen Chor zu verstehen, der sich immer von neuem wieder in einer apollinischen Bilderwelt entladet. Jene Chorpartien, mit denen die Tragödie durchflochten ist, sind also gewissermaassen der Mutterschooss des ganzen sogenannten Dialogs d.h. der gesammten Bühnenwelt, des eigentlichen Dramas. In mehreren auf einander folgenden Entladungen strahlt dieser Urgrund der Tragödie jene Vision des Dramas aus [...]"

1.2.2. SCHOPENHAUER, BERNAYS AND “DER GRIECHISCHE STAAT”

One of the most explicitly political tracts from Nietzsche’s early period is CV 3. This unpublished essay was originally part of an early draft of GT (entitled “Ursprung und Ziel der Tragödie”), only to be subsequently removed.²⁸ In CV 3, Nietzsche launches a thinly veiled attack on the early Wagner’s humanist conviction that higher culture requires the freedom of the ordinarily oppressed masses, which is in turn only secured through perennial social revolution.²⁹ Another foil of CV 3 is Wagner’s later conviction that patriotic militarism is a blight for the state due to the fact that it threatens social stability.³⁰ Remarking upon the violence, slavery and war inherent to the Greek state, Nietzsche seeks to counter the rosy, Christianised picture of the Greeks presented by Winkelmann and Schiller; what is more, he launches into a serious examination of whether such violence might in fact represent a *precondition* of higher culture. During this period, Nietzsche is profoundly concerned with identifying the grounds of a “wahre Kultur” – i.e., a noble, unified and artistically productive society. He takes ancient Greece as the prototype of just such a society; conversely, he views modern Germans as the epitome of a decadent

²⁸ See KGW III/5, pp.142-55; compare NL 10[1] 7.333-49. Martin Ruehl has speculated that this was likely removed from the final draft of GT at the behest of Wagner. See Martin Ruehl, “‘Politeia’ 1871: Young Nietzsche on the Greek State”, in Paul Bishop (ed.), *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), pp.79-97 (p.83). As Niemeyer (2009) has noted, however, there is nonetheless a distinctly Wagnerian vein of anti-Semitism running through the piece (p.187). However, Ruehl’s convincing analysis refutes Niemeyer’s later claim that CV 3 “darf allerdings, da er [CV 3] dem hier gesetzten Kontext (Wagner) unterworfen scheint, nicht pars pro toto genommen werden (und kann insoweit auch nicht erweitert werden dahingehend, N. sei hinreichend als ‘K[rieg]-Philosoph’ überführt)” (ibid.).

²⁹ See Richard Wagner, *Die Kunst und Revolution* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1850), pp.40-5. For an insightful account of how Nietzsche’s rejection of Wagner and his defection to Burckhardt played a key role in the composition of CV 3, see Ruehl (2004).

³⁰ See “Über Staat und Religion”, in Hans von Wolzogen and Richard Sternfeld (eds.), *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 16 vols (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1911), vol.8, pp.3-29 (p.12).

pseudo-culture.³¹ In his endeavour to discover the roots of cultural health, Nietzsche rebels against Socialist and Communist visions of the ideal social condition as one of peaceful, substantive equality. For Nietzsche, this amounts to the forfeiting of culture altogether. Indeed, in his eyes, the state (*Staat*), along with the forms of higher culture enabled by the state, are predicated on slavery, and it is through war that such slaves are procured. Culture is thus the child of violence³²; and as such, Nietzsche gorily likens “herrliche Kultur” to a “bluttriefenden Sieger [...], der bei seinem Triumphzuge die an seinen Wagen gefesselten Besiegten als Sklaven mitschleppt”.³³

But *how* does slavery enable higher culture for Nietzsche? The answer to this is that, in many respects echoing Aristotle, Nietzsche thinks that the artistic genius is only afforded the leisure time he needs to produce his grand works of art by living off the surplus produced by a base of slave-labour.³⁴ But this is not all bad for the labouring masses according to Nietzsche; now resonating with Wagner, he views the artist as dignifying, and even giving meaning to, their toilsome existence.³⁵

Once this pyramidal state, with its inegalitarian division of labour, has been formed by means of war, Nietzsche maintains that it then shields the genius from violent conflict for extended periods of time, allowing their works to attain fruition – *constant* war would constitute an impediment to cultural success. Thus, so far, his affirmation of war is limited to its role as a *matrix* for higher culture, though we should observe that cultural fecundity is clearly figured as the normative ground upon which Nietzsche’s praise of war is based.

In probing the question as to how culture and violence might in reality be complementary rather than antagonistic, Nietzsche continues the realist legacy of

³¹ See CV 3 1.764. For more on this, see ch.3, §1 of this thesis.

³² CV 3 1.767; compare GM II 17 5.324.

³³ CV 3 1.771; see also NL 1[10] 7.343.

³⁴ In Aristotle, we find the idea that freedom and higher modes of cultural praxis (particularly political praxis) are predicated on slavery. For an overview of this, see Terence Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp.411ff.

³⁵ CV 3 1.776; compare Wagner (2015), p.26.

Jacob Burckhardt (and, before him, Machiavelli³⁶). In the first part of *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (entitled “der Staat als Kunstwerk”), Burckhardt traces the way in which Renaissance states were forged through calculated and violent despotism. Drawing a causal relation between PDC and artistic excellence, he hypothesises that the violence committed by the Baglione family in fifteenth-century Perugia, where the twelve-year-old Raphael was growing up, was probably the inspiration for the painter’s masterful depictions of St. George and St. Michael.³⁷ In *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Burckhardt is also at pains to highlight just how integral both slavery and wars of eradication were to the fabric of ancient Greek life.³⁸

As CV 3 continues, Nietzsche’s line of thought concerning war begins to evince distinct parallels with Bernays’ account of catharsis. At the same time, we witness Nietzsche developing a Schopenhauerian metaphysic to ground his belief in the inevitability of war (a belief that he in fact shared with Burckhardt and Schopenhauer alike). For reasons that will become clear, in order to fully appreciate the cathartic dynamic at play in CV 3, we need to begin by making an excursus on how Schopenhauer’s philosophy is covertly operating in the text.

³⁶ See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by Harvey Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), ch.14 (p.59): “[the Prince] should never lift his thoughts from the exercise of war, and in peace he should exercise it more than in war.”

³⁷ Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Wien: Phaidon, 1934), p.18; see also “Der Krieg als Kunstwerk” (pp.58-60), where Burckhardt also draws a strong connection between art and war, showing how prevalent war was as an artistic theme among the renaissance Italians. On a similar note, in *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Burckhardt describes Delphi as “das große monumentale Museum des Hasses von Griechen gegen Griechen, mit höchster künstlerischer Verewigung des gegenseitig angetanen Herzeleids”. See Jacob Burckhardt. *Griechische Kulturgeschichte: Alle vier Bände in Einem Buch* (Berlin: Hofenberg, 2014) (vol.1, p.285).

³⁸ On slavery, see Burckhardt (2014), esp. vol.1, pp.141-58: “Es fällt uns einigermassen schwer, ein Griechenland zu denken, das neben vier bis fünf Millionen Freier zwölf Millionen Sklaven, fast lauter ungriechischer Herkunft beherbergt hätte” (vol.1, p.146); and see also vol.4, p.258: where Burckhardt describes how, in fifth-century (B.C.) Greece, “Ausmorden, Verkauf in die Sklaverei, Verwüsten aller Pflanzungen, Ödelegen und Zerstören ist an der Tagesordnung.”

The early Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer and Hobbes in positing the natural state of humans to be one of *bellum omnium contra omnes*.³⁹ But what are Schopenhauer's reasons for making this claim? In WWV, the world is said to have two aspects: that of "Wille" (or "will", in English), signifying the noumenal world in itself; and that of "Vorstellung" (or "representation", in English), signifying the phenomenal world of objects and appearance. The world as will exists as an atemporal unity, which underlies all plurality at the level of representation, and can be described as a pathos of desire occasioned by a corresponding sense of lack – it is what Schopenhauer calls a "blinder Drang" (WWV I §34, p.246). At the most abstract level of the world as representation, there is then the atemporal plurality of Platonic Ideas. These are what Schopenhauer calls the "Stufe der Objectivation des Willens", and they constitute the ideal form of every possible species of representable phenomenon (WWV I §25, p.187). But diverging from Plato, Schopenhauer describes these phenomena as striving against one another in an effort to realise their inner Idea at the level of appearances:

Beständig muß die beharrende Materie die Form wechseln, indem am Leitfaden der Kausalität, mechanische physische chemische organische Erscheinungen, sich gierig zum Hervortreten drängen, einander die Materie entreißend, da jede ihre Idee offenbaren will. Durch die gesammte Natur läßt sich dieser Streit verfolgen, ja sie besteht eben wieder nur durch ihn. (WWV I §27, p.208)⁴⁰

The phenomena in which Ideas are embodied are therefore caught in a relentless struggle according to Schopenhauer. With respect to living organisms, this is best understood as the struggle over the resources that are requisite for survival and full development. This makes destructive conflict a metaphysically necessary characteristic of existence in a number of different ways. First, the situation is one also described by Malthus and Darwin, though now given a metaphysical basis: there is a superabundance of competitors in a situation of conflict over limited resources,

³⁹ See WWV I §61, where Schopenhauer explicitly employs Hobbes' phraseology (p.432).

⁴⁰ This text is cited in PHG 5 1.826 as evidence corroborating Heraclitus' worldview.

which renders destructive contest an ineluctable fact of existence.⁴¹ The second reason is that these phenomena must also consume one another (as is evinced by any food chain).⁴² Indeed, with existence painted as a maelstrom of destructive struggle driven by an aching sense of lack, it comes as little surprise that Schopenhauer pessimistically interprets the world as marked by endless suffering.

The underlying, unitary will of Schopenhauer therefore divides itself across the plurality of its phenomenal forms, and as these consume one another, so the will consumes itself. The will is thus said to be divided against itself (“selbstentzweit”),⁴³ caught in a state of restless hunger, lack and striving.⁴⁴ As such, for Schopenhauer, the essence of the will is self-consumption⁴⁵ and self-laceration (“Selbsterfleischung”).⁴⁶ This generates a third argument in Schopenhauer for the metaphysical necessity of destructive conflict: since every appearing form is an embodiment of the will, and must therefore reproduce its inner nature, “will Jeder Alles für sich, will Alles besitzen, wenigstens beherrschen, und was sich ihm widersetzt, möchte er vernichten”.⁴⁷ We can syllogistically summarise this argument as follows:

⁴¹ See WWV I §56, p.403: “überall die mannigfaltigen Naturkräfte und organischen Formen einander die Materie streitig machen, an der sie hervortreten wollen, indem Jedes nur besitzt was es dem Andern entrissen hat, und so ein steter Kampf um Leben und Tod unterhalten wird”. See also Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on The Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), ch.3 and ch.8 (p.44); and Charles Darwin’s wedge metaphor in the first edition of *The Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), ch.3 (p.67): “In looking at Nature, it is most necessary [...] never to forget that every single organic being around us may be said to be striving to the utmost to increase in numbers; that each lives by a struggle at some period of its life; that heavy destruction inevitably falls either on the young or old, during each generation or at recurrent intervals. [...] The face of Nature may be compared to a yielding surface, with ten thousand sharp wedges packed close together and driven inwards by incessant blows, sometimes one wedge being struck, and then another with greater force.”

⁴² See WWV I §27, p.208.

⁴³ See WWV I §27, p.208 and §56, p.403.

⁴⁴ See WWV I §56, p.403: “Eben ein solches rastloses, nimmer befriedigtes Streben ist das Daseyn der Pflanze, ein unaufhörliches Treiben.”

⁴⁵ WWV I §28, p.217: “[D]er Wille an sich selber zehren muß, weil außer ihm nichts da ist und er ein hungriger Wille ist. Daher die Jagd, die Angst und das Leiden.”

⁴⁶ See e.g. WWV I §51, p.335.

⁴⁷ WWV I §61, p.431.

The Metaphysical Reflection Argument

1. The will is characterised by destructively conflictual activity;
2. Every existing individual is an instantiation of the will;
3. Therefore, every existing (human) individual is necessarily characterised by destructively conflictual activity.

Despite the necessity with which individuals reflect the characteristics of the metaphysical ground, rule of law and state institutions can, says Schopenhauer, be used to suppress such *Eris* (strife) within the sphere of human society. This is achieved by threatening, and imposing, deterrent punishment; however, says Schopenhauer,

endlich wendet sich die aus dem Innern glücklich vertriebene Eris zuletzt nach außen: als Streit der Individuen durch die Staatseinrichtung verbannt, kommt sie von außen als Krieg der Völker wieder, und fordert nun im Großen und mit einem Male, als aufgehäuften Schuld, die blutigen Opfer ein [...].⁴⁸

⁴⁸ WWV I §62, p.454. Compare Burckhardt's argument that war is practically unavoidable ("unvermeidlich"): "Es gehört mit zur Jämmerlichkeit alles Irdischen, daß schon der Einzelne zum vollen Gefühl seines Wertes nur zu gelangen glaubt, wenn er sich mit anderen vergleicht und es diesen je nach Umständen tatsächlich zu fühlen gibt. Staat, Gesetz, Religion und Sitte haben alle Hände voll zu tun, um diesen Hang des Einzelnen zu bändigen, d. h. ins Innere des Menschen zurückzudrängen. Für den Einzelnen gilt es dann als lächerlich, unerträglich, abgeschmackt, gefährlich, verbrecherisch, sich ihm offen hinzugeben.

Im großen aber, von Volk zu Volk, gilt es als zeitweise erlaubt und unvermeidlich, aus irgend welchen Vorwänden übereinander herzufallen.

[...]Ein Volk lernt wirklich seine volle Nationalkraft nur im Kriege, im vergleichenden Kampf gegen andere Völker kennen, weil sie nur dann vorhanden ist; auf diesem Punkt wird es dann suchen müssen, sie festzuhalten; eine allgemeine Vergrößerung des Maßstabes ist eingetreten. (Jacob Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* [Berlin: W. Spemann, 1905], pp.162-3.)

For Burckhardt, the necessity of war is based on an empirical-psychological, rather than metaphysical, claim: it is the desire to test one's strength against another that leads so ineluctably to war. War is thereby conceived as a kind of measure or *Maßstab*. This compulsion for comparison (in many ways recalling Rousseau's notion of *amour propre*) is posited by Burckhardt as an essential quality of man, and since the only way in which it is satisfied at an international scale is through war, he avers that it is almost inevitable that communities engage in military conflict with one another. As with Schopenhauer, even if

With this tendency towards Eris necessarily cumulating like a piled-up debt (“aufgehäuften Schuld”) within collective human existence, we can already begin to see an affinity between the dynamic described by Schopenhauer at a metaphysical-social level and that described by Bernays’ Aristotle at the aesthetic-psychological level. We should now return to CV 3 in order to examine how Nietzsche brings about a more complete rapprochement of the dynamics respectively described by Bernays and Schopenhauer.

One of the notable differences between (the early) Nietzsche’s and Schopenhauer’s will-based metaphysics is the recurrent reference to discharge (“Entladung”) that is so striking in the former, though largely absent from latter. This is particularly the case in CV 3. For Nietzsche, as for Schopenhauer, the will’s essence as inner contradiction (and self-consumption) must be reflected at the level of appearances;⁴⁹ however, in CV 3, what the will ultimately strives to realise in appearance is genius, beauty and redemptive works of art. It is through these highest levels of objectification that the will can marvel at itself and attain temporary solace and redemption from its suffering.⁵⁰ Yet Nietzsche, reprising an argument that can be traced back to Hartmann, holds that beauty and cultural development are foreclosed by the natural struggle for existence (that is, the “Kampf ums Dasein”).⁵¹ These two originary tendencies by means of which the will manifests itself are, in the state of nature, incompatible – indeed, in this condition, the drive for art (“die zwingende Kraft des künstlerischen Triebes” [CV 3 1.766]) is fated to lose the battle against what Nietzsche calls the “Trieb des bellum omnium contra omnes”.

this compulsion must be granted periodic expression at an inter-community level, the state can nonetheless effectively force its suppression at an individual level.

⁴⁹ See NL 7[157] 7.199-200.

⁵⁰ CV 3 1.770-1.

⁵¹ See Federico Gerratana, “Der Wahn jenseits des Menschen: Zur frühen E. v. Hartmann-Rezeption Nietzsches (1869-1874)”, *Nietzsche-Studien*, 17 (1988), 391-433 (see esp. pp.418-21). See also NL 7[24] 7.143-4. On the notion of the *Kunsttrieb* and its roots in Häckel and Schiller, see also Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.89-96. Moore, however, misses the important Hartmann connection. Compare also WWV II §27.

For this reason, the state (*Staat*) is needed to impede or dam-up the *Kampf ums Dasein* for the sake of cultivating the will's artistic impulse and, thereby, propagating culture. Echoing both Schopenhauer (and Burckhardt), though now using the vocabulary of "Entladung", Nietzsche further suggests that the state cannot altogether inhibit the destructive structure of existence; rather,

nach der allgemein eingetretenen Staatenbildung, concentrirt sich jener Trieb des bellum omnium contra omnes von Zeit zu Zeit zum schrecklichen Kriegsgewölk der Völker und entladet sich gleichsam in seltneren, aber um so stärkeren Schlägen und Wetterstrahlen. In den Zwischenpausen aber ist der Gesellschaft doch Zeit gelassen, unter der nach innen gewendeten zusammengedrängten Wirkung jenes bellum, allerorts zu keimen und zu grünen, um, sobald es einige wärmere Tage giebt, die leuchtenden Blüten des Genius hervorsprießen zu lassen.⁵²

From this it is evident that, although the destructive "Trieb" for all-out war is depicted as irreducible, the political apparatus of the state *is* able to temporarily inhibit this proclivity, limiting it to short though severe outbursts of PDC. This ensures periods of peace and stability, during which the genius can work unhampered by the tumult of war; accordingly, this dynamic enables the flourishing of culture.⁵³ While the general *Kampf ums Dasein* is negatively valued insofar as it constitutes an impediment to culture and genius, Nietzsche positively values belligerent explosions of PDC insofar as they facilitate the ends of culture.⁵⁴

In this depiction of a dynamic involving an energetic build-up followed by a qualitatively untransformed discharge, we bear witness to Nietzsche extending the Bernaysian model of catharsis to sociological phenomena.⁵⁵ Further buttressing this reading, we find that Nietzsche expands upon this apology for war in such a way as

⁵² CV 3 1.772; see also NL 10[1] 7.344.

⁵³ See also NL 7[121] 7.169-70; cf. CV3 1.772-7.

⁵⁴ NL 1[10] 7.344: "Für diese Helena und ihre Kinder führte er jene Kriege: welcher Richter dürfte hier verurtheilen?"

⁵⁵ Though Nietzsche, unlike Bernays, employs this dynamic to explain the dynamic of certain "Triebe" rather than "Affekte", the difference in this case appears to be minimal, as they both refer to particular behavioural tendencies, the latter merely placing emphasis on the emotional disposition underlying these tendencies.

to both bring more clearly into relief the influence of Bernays, and give the Schopenhauerian metaphysical speculation some empirical basis. Nietzsche specifically adds that the political drives (“Triebe”) were the means developed by the Greeks to suppress the drive for all-out war, but these eventually became overdeveloped or overloaded (“überladen”). Such an excess of political activity had the adverse effect of hindering cultural development and fomenting violent political rivalries, culminating in revolution and war.⁵⁶ Going beyond Aristotle (and Schopenhauer), Nietzsche therefore suggests that pathological accretion occurs in the very drives contrived to inhibit destructive conflict (i.e. the political drives). War ensues as a result, and the destructive energies accreted in the will are released or discharged in a quantitatively more condensed, but qualitatively *untransformed*, manner (in accordance with Bernays’, rather than Lessings’, account of catharsis). Nietzsche states that these violent releases illuminate how “der Wille von Zeit zu Zeit solche Selbstzerfleischungen als ein Ventil gebraucht, auch hierin seiner entsetzlichen Natur getreu.”⁵⁷ Insofar as Nietzsche claims that these releases are required by the will in order for it to remain faithful (“getreu”) to its nature, it is clear that he is positing the “metaphysical reflection” argument as the necessary ground of this cathartic process. According to this ontology of PDC then, war is postulated as an obligatory lesser evil (the greater being a perpetual, pre-social form of total war). The argument advanced for the necessity of destructive conflict within this vision of (social) existence can therefore be articulated as follows:

⁵⁶ CV 3 1.771. We may think of Burckhardt’s (2014) criticism of fifth-century (B.C.) Athens (vol.4, esp. pp.535-39).

⁵⁷ See e.g. NL 7 [121]7.170; 7[169] 7.205; 7[122] 7.175; 7[64] 7.153; see also GT 22 1.141; GT 4 1.39.

The Bernaysian Catharsis Argument

1. All humans are necessarily characterised by an irreducible drive for physically destructive conflict (as demonstrated by the metaphysical reflection argument);
2. This drive can either be expressed continuously or in short concentrated bursts;
3. Humans organised into a *Staat* impede destructive conflict;
4. Therefore, humans organised into a *Staat* are necessarily characterised by an irreducible drive for physically destructive conflict that is expressed in short bursts.

Nietzsche's reasons for affirming PDC are now far more transparent: by discharging the drive for PDC in short outbursts of war, the now regulated ("reguliert") – i.e. moderated and rehabilitated – political drives can be directed towards the generation of genius "mit neuer und überraschender Kraft".⁵⁸ Nietzsche therefore concludes that "in diesem Sinne ist das schreckliche Schauspiel der sich zerreißen den Parteien etwas Verehrungswürdiges."

In describing this dynamic as one that generates an end-state of healthy equilibrium (i.e. between the political, destructive and artistic drives) all four of the aforementioned criteria required to label a given energetic economy "cathartic" (in Bernays' sense) have been fulfilled: there is an initial condition of pathological accretion, followed by a process of active stimulation and raw discharge, which culminates in the reattainment of a healthy state of equilibrium. Yet two questions now present themselves: what happens to Nietzsche's position regarding destructive conflict when a) he definitively repudiates the quasi-Schopenhauerian metaphysical world-view upon which the Bernaysian catharsis argument is grounded?; and b) he embarks on a project calling for the *transformation* of destructive into productive

⁵⁸ NL 7[121] 7.169-70: "Wenigstens pflegt der durch solche Ereignisse regulirte politische Trieb mit neuer und überraschender Kraft an der Vorbereitung der Geburt des Genius zu arbeiten."

conflict? In the following two sections, I will endeavour to show how these two developments in Nietzsche's thought problematize the cathartic model we have seen him formulate in CV 3.

1.3. *VERNICHTUNGSKAMPF* AFTER METAPHYSICS

As we have just seen, the Bernaysian catharsis argument is decisively grounded in the Schopenhauerian metaphysical reflection argument. But Nietzsche famously came to reject such metaphysical presuppositions; indeed, he had already adumbrated a damning critique of Schopenhauer in 1868, though this was shelved until the composition of MA. In this text, "Zu Schopenhauer", Nietzsche states that "das eine Wort 'Wille' sammt seinen Prädikaten" is a "schwergemünztes, viel umschließendes Wort".⁵⁹ Although the world-will is supposed to exist in total isolation from the realm of objectivity, and therefore cannot even be conceived of as an object of knowledge, Nietzsche claims that, within Schopenhauer's metaphysics, "die sämtlichen Prädikate des Willens von der Erscheinungswelt geborgt sind."⁶⁰ In terms of the published works, in the first part of MA, Nietzsche deepens his criticism of Schopenhauer's *Weltanschauung* and commends the "strengere Logiker, nachdem sie den Begriff des Metaphysischen scharf als den des Unbedingten, folglich auch Unbedingenden festgestellt hatten, jeden Zusammenhang zwischen dem Unbedingten (der metaphysischen Welt) und der uns bekannten Welt in Abrede gestellt" (MA 16).⁶¹

Nietzsche therefore reveals himself to be in favour of at least a return to the negative conception of the thing in itself as an "unfaßbares X", à la Kant, if not the

⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Zu Schopenhauer", KGW I/4, pp.417-26 (§1, p.419).

⁶⁰ Ibid., §3 (p.424).

⁶¹ See also MA 9, 13, 15, 17, 21.

complete abandonment of philosophical inquiry into the existence and essence of things in themselves (a position to which he would later wholeheartedly commit⁶²). These lines of reasoning preclude the possibility that predicates such as “self-consuming” and “self-lacerating” could be assigned to the world in itself (that is, to the will); indeed, it renders untenable the notion of there being any relation of reflection between the world in itself and the world of objectivity. With the failure of the metaphysical reflection argument, the Bernaysian catharsis argument of CV 3 likewise falls – the reason for this being that the former is a foundational premise of the latter. By this logic, an unstoppably accumulating drive for PDC can no longer be metaphysically grounded. So, while Nietzsche does not directly take issue with the argument for the necessity of PDC that he presents in CV 3, we can see that with his apostasy from Schopenhauer (and metaphysics in general), it becomes simply unsustainable. It is perhaps unsurprising then that alongside his renunciation of Schopenhauerian metaphysics, Nietzsche begins to formulate alternative stances towards PDC, and it is to these that we should now turn our inquiry.

1.3.1. THE PROJECT OF AGONAL TRANSFORMATION: A SKETCH

One of the notable ways in which Nietzsche departs from the ideas of CV 3 is in his development of an agonal conception of PDC. Although I undertake a full analysis of Nietzsche’s conception of the agon in Chapter 3, it behoves us to briefly foreground the principal ways in which his agonism is at odds with the cathartic model of CV 3. It is in CV 5 that we discover the clearest delineation of this divergent conception of PDC, even though the essay was written in the same year as CV 3 (1872), and belongs to the same collection of unpublished essays. First off, in this text, Nietzsche is unequivocally critical of even short outbursts of PDC. Thus, he appears to concur with Hesiod’s indictment of the Eris goddess responsible for

⁶² See e.g. GD Fabel 6.80-1.

“Vernichtungskampf” (i.e. “den schlimmen Krieg und Hader”).⁶³ Nietzsche censures PDC on account of its being antithetical to the productive, agonal conflict, symbolised by the “gute Eris”. It was this latter type of conflict that lay at the foundation of much of ancient Greek culture, and which characterised the contests fought among poets, politicians, musicians, athletes and dramatists (among many others). Nietzsche therefore implicitly calls for the *transformation* of *Vernichtungskämpfe* into these measured forms of contest; namely, insofar as he both tracks and exalts the way Greek (agonal) culture grew *out of* the condition of *Vernichtungskampf* that dominated Greece prior to Homer.⁶⁴

In CV 5, the figure of the genius (“Genius”) (particularly Homer) is portrayed as the instigator of this shift. He *acknowledges* the terrible impulse for war (the “so furchtbar vorhandenen Trieb”), and instead of falling into pessimistic resignation at the thought of its existence, asks: “was will ein Leben des Kampfes und des Sieges?” The answer to this, in CV 5 and MA at any rate, is that the drive (“Trieb”) achieving satisfaction in PDC is one fundamentally seeking contest and victory. Nietzsche no longer posits an essentially destructive “Trieb des bellum omnium contra omnes”. The drive at the root of PDC can, according to this account, be satisfied through an institution such as the agon, which grants people just such opportunities for contest and victory, though now through non-violent modes of conflict. By illuminating the potential for such transformation, the (poetic) genius can initiate the move away from PDC and towards agonal culture: “Der Dichter erzieht: die tigerartigen Zerfleischungstriebe der Griechen weiß er zu übertragen in

⁶³ CV 5 1.786.

⁶⁴ See CV 5 1.785: “[W]ie sich in Wahrheit vom Morde und der Mordsühne aus der Begriff des griechischen Rechtes entwickelt hat, so nimmt auch die edlere Kultur ihren ersten Siegeskranz vom Altar der Mordsühne.” However, see also NL 16[26] 7.403, where Nietzsche still seems to be operating within a Schopenhauerian metaphysic: “1. Problem: wie wird der Wille, der furchtbare, gereinigt und geläutert, d. h. umgesetzt und in edlere Triebe verwandelt? Durch eine Veränderung der Vorstellungswelt, durch die große Ferne seines Zieles, so daß er sich im übermäßigen Ausspannen veredeln muß. Einfluß der Kunst auf die Reinigung des Willens. Der Wettkampf entsteht aus dem Kriege? Als ein künstlerisches Spiel und Nachahmung?”

die gute Eris. [...] Die Gymnastik der idealisirte Krieg.” (NL 16[15] 7.398). In WS 226, this picture is painted with greater clarity:

Da das Siegen- und Hervorragewollen ein unüberwindlicher Zug der Natur ist, älter und ursprünglicher, als alle Achtung und Freude der Gleichstellung, so hatte der griechische Staat den gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampf innerhalb der Gleichen sanctionirt, also einen Tummelplatz abgegränzt, wo jener Trieb sich entladen konnte, ohne die politische Ordnung in Gefahr zu bringen. Mit dem endlichen Verfall des gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampfes gerieth der griechische Staat in innere Unruhe und Auflösung.

It is the drive for victory (“Siegen”) and pre-eminence (“Hervorragewollen”), rather than all-out *bellum*, that is now figured as an immutable natural impetus (“unüberwindlicher Zug der Natur”). We can see from the vocabulary of *Entladung* that Nietzsche still conceives of this process in terms of cathartic discharge; and to be sure, during this period, he still views catharsis as fundamental to ancient Greek culture: “Die Nothwendigkeit der Entladung, der κάθαρσις, ein Grundgesetz des griechischen Wesens. Ansammlung und Entladung in gewaltsamen, zeitlich getrennten Stößen” (NL 5[147] 8.79). In this note, we bear witness to the same dynamic of accumulation and discharge, yet, understood in the context of WS 226, we can assume that Nietzsche is not referring to the discharge of a drive toward PDC, but a drive for ascendancy. Of course, this drive *can* express itself destructively if it is not channelled into, and contained within, the correct social practices (such as the agon, for example). This also sheds light on VM 220, where Nietzsche attributes the cultural success of the Greeks to the fact that

Sie leugnen den Naturtrieb, der in den schlimmen Eigenschaften sich ausdrückt, nicht ab, sondern ordnen ihn ein und beschränken ihn auf bestimmte Culte und Tage, nachdem sie genug Vorsichtsmaassregeln erfunden haben, um jenen wilden Gewässern einen möglichst unschädlichen Abfluss geben zu können.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ VM 220; See also NL 5[146-7] 8.77-9.

Reading this alongside WS 226, one way we might conceive of this *Naturtrieb* is as the aforementioned desire for ascendancy. Again, this drive demands expression, and so some form of cathartic model is certainly still at play (N.B. the hydraulic figurative language in the above quote); however, this drive is no longer conceived as intrinsically destructive or even harmful (i.e. *schlimm*) in nature – indeed, with the aid of the state, it can now be safely channelled away from its murderous behavioural component.

CV 5 and the cited texts from the late 1870s all imply that PDC is neither metaphysically nor psychologically necessary (i.e. immutable); it is rather the expression of some polymorphous desire for combat, victory and overcoming (in many ways, as we shall see, prefiguring the notion of *Wille zur Macht*). Certainly, from CV 5 onwards, this idea of transfiguring destructive conflictual relations into those of a more productively conflictual character represents an enduring theme in Nietzsche's writings.⁶⁶ As should now be clear, however, this transformative model is contradicted by the cathartic account of PDC presented in CV 3. The reason for this is that these early and middle period texts are incompatible with the idea that destructive conflict is a metaphysically or psychologically necessary feature of human existence. From this perspective, the choice that CV 3 presented us with between perpetual and episodic war appears to be a false dichotomy.

Before moving on, we should consider one objection to the incompatibility that I have purported exists between the cathartic and transformational models of PDC. Thus, one might counter that the situation is akin to that which Freud describes in his account of the psychological limitations of sexual sublimation:

Ins Unbegrenzte fortzusetzen ist dieser Verschiebungsprozeß [d. h. Sublimation] aber sicherlich nicht, so wenig wie die Umsetzung der Wärme in mechanische Arbeit bei unseren Maschinen. Ein gewisses Maß direkter sexueller Befriedigung scheint für die allermeisten Organisationen unerlässlich, und die Versagung dieses individuell

⁶⁶ This is also true of the later works, with respect to both physical *and* non-physical forms of destructive conflict. On physical conflict, see NL 7[161] 10.295; on non-physical conflict, see GD Moral 2-3 and EH Weise 7.

variablen Maßes straft sich durch Erscheinungen, die wir infolge ihrer Funktionsschädlichkeit und ihres subjektiven Unlustcharakters zum Kranksein rechnen müssen.⁶⁷

Perhaps PDC, like sexual energy in Freud's picture of psychic economy, can be transformed *up to a point*, which always leaves an untransformable remainder resilient to sublimation. Maybe Nietzsche thinks that, rather than being wholly untransformable, our predilection for PDC is rather defined by a limit at which point individuals are compelled to engage in war insofar sublimational institutions such as the agon have become ineffective. However, the first problem with this attempt at a rapprochement of the cathartic and transformational models of PDC is that it lacks textual support. The only evidence for such an interpretation is in CV 3. In this text, we saw that "unter der nach innen gewendeten zusammengedrängten Wirkung jenes bellum", the *Gesellschaft* is able "allerorts zu keimen und zu grünen"; however, this does not suggest a significant amount of transformation or canalisation of the accumulated destructive energies (if any). It merely implies, in a rather ambiguous manner, that they can be *used* while they are accumulating. But even if we assent to this charitable interpretive strategy, this is still not enough to rescue the agonistic reading of Nietzsche, since even this approach must still affirm the presence of an ever-mounting quantity of PDC, which is beyond our transformative efforts, and whose raw discharge must be sanctioned as a prerequisite of social health. The reading of Nietzsche as a general advocate agonism (à la Kaufmann, Hatab or Acampora), would nonetheless be vitiated. But CV 3 is not the only problem for agonistic readings. As I will now endeavour to show, in MA itself, we find that this line of interpretation is unable to account for further counterevidence.

⁶⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Die kulturelle Sexualmoral und die moderne Nervosität", in *Gesammelte Werke*, 17 vols ([London: Imago, 1940-1952] and [Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1966]), vol.7, pp.143-67.

1.3.2. NIETZSCHE'S REALISM: WAR AS A CULTURAL STIMULANT

Even in MA, Nietzsche is not wholly committed to the project of agonal transformation. He also presents us with a realist account of the benefits of PDC – one that is purged of the metaphysical underpinnings of CV 3. But these realist reflections diverge from CV 3 in another important way. PDC is now praised insofar as it *energises* a community – that is, not insofar as it enables the *discharge* of energy, as in CV 3. This idea is clearly prefigured in Burckhardt's *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*. Indeed, it is worthwhile sketching Burckhardt's position in this text since this will grant us a richer understanding of Nietzsche's own argumentation. Burckhardt quotes Lasaulx's claim that for an old culture, which “nicht mehr eine gewisse Masse unverbrauchter Naturkräfte in sich trägt, aus denen es sich erfrischen und verjüngen kann”, being invaded by a younger, “kulturfähig” people can, in the long term, have a rejuvenating effect. As an example, Burckhardt cites the Teutonic invasion of the exhausted late Roman Empire. He nevertheless stipulates that, unqualified, this is a naively optimistic claim, and that suffering colonisation is by no means a guaranteed cultural boon; for example, the Mongols, argues Burckhardt, tended to have a merely detrimental effect on the cultures that they conquered.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding, he maintains that suffering defeat in a war of colonisation represents a “notwendiges Moment höherer Entwicklung” for a people.

Though passively suffering defeat in war is in this way praised by Burckhardt, he reserves his most laudatory words for the *active* pursuit of warfare – in particular on account of its enlivening, ordering, disciplining effects. On the one hand, according to Burckhardt, war has this beneficial effect due to the fact that it

⁶⁸ Jacob Burckhardt (1905), p.161; See also Egon Flaig, “Kultur und Krieg. Antihumanismus bei Jacob Burckhardt und Friedrich Nietzsche”, in Richard Faber (ed.), *Streit um den Humanismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2003), pp.137-56 (esp. pp.145-7).

both fosters the cultivation of heroic virtues and counteracts the cowardly foibles individuals develop during times of peace:

[D]ie Kriege reinigten die Atmosphäre wie Gewitterstürme, stärkten die Nerven, erschütterten die Gemüter, stellten die heroischen Tugenden her, auf welche ursprünglich die Staaten gegründet gewesen, gegenüber Entnervung, Falschheit und Feigheit.⁶⁹

Compounding this, however, war also forces a society to order itself in what Burckhardt holds to be a vastly more economic manner:

[D]er Krieg, welcher so viel wie Unterordnung alles Lebens und Besitzes unter einen momentanen Zweck ist, [hat] eine enorme sittliche Superiorität über den bloßen gewaltsamen Egoismus des Einzelnen; er entwickelt die Kräfte im Dienst eines Allgemeinen und zwar des höchsten Allgemeinen und innerhalb einer Disziplin, welche zugleich die höchste heroische Tugend sich entfalten läßt [...].

Und da ferner nur wirkliche Macht einen längeren Frieden und Sicherheit garantieren kann, der Krieg aber die wirkliche Macht konstatiert, so liegt in einem solchen Krieg der künftige Friede.⁷⁰

Preparation for war unifies a social body by dint of the fact that individuals are forced to fight as one in order to overcome an external threat to their collective existence. In times of peace, Burckhardt argues, people become dissatisfied with structural social inequalities. The consequent demand for rights generates unrest and disunity, which in turn effects a general weakening of the social whole. By contrast, in times of war, all willingly submit to hierarchical organisation because all know this to be the most effective stratagem – it is in this way that Burckhardt thinks that egoism is overcome by the brute desire to prevail in the face of potential extermination.⁷¹ War mobilises a society, transforming it into a potently well-oiled war-machine.⁷²

⁶⁹ Burckhardt (1905), p.164.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ However, as we shall see in the following chapter, in his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Burckhardt is more sceptical regarding the cultural benefits of war (as compared with those of the agon).

⁷² Compare FW 283.

Large-scale PDC is thus conceived by Burckhardt as an instance of cultural *crisis*. Recalling Kuhn's depiction of scientific crises, which give rise to new scientific paradigms better able to structure a given discipline of knowledge, Burckhardt conceives of martial crises as the stimulant needed to reestablish social coherence. He adds, however, that modern wars do not qualify as crises on account of their being too small and temporary to touch upon the quotidian existence of European citizens; accordingly, such conflicts do not bless Europeans with the beneficial effects associated with "crisis" wars. Burckhardt presciently warns us that modern wars therefore merely postpone the coming "Hauptkrisis". However, we should note that he also views it as perfectly possible for cultures to be simply eradicated by such crises without enjoying any of the aforementioned regenerative effects.⁷³

But how does Nietzsche reprise and develop these themes? If we look at MA, we can see that he adopts Burckhardt's commendation of war in almost all of its essentials. In MA 444, for example, he venerates war insofar as it "barbarisirt [...] und macht dadurch natürlicher; er ist für die Cultur Schlaf oder Winterszeit, der Mensch kommt kräftiger zum Guten und Bösen aus ihm heraus." Like Burckhardt, Nietzsche thus maintains that even defeat can be beneficial insofar as it acts as a rejuvenating form of cultural hibernation. Taken on its own, this laconic affirmation of war is not particularly cogent. However, drawing on our analysis of Burckhardt, we can now infer the implicit rationale informing Nietzsche's provocative assertions: suffering defeat in war can clear away the dross that encumbers a decadent culture, and though potentially devastating in the short term, can, in the long-term, reenergise that culture by fertilising it with new cultural influences.

But what about the advantages of *actively* engaging in war? While Nietzsche gestures towards these in MA 444, it is in MA 477 (entitled "der Krieg unentbehrlich") that he properly elucidates his position. Moreover, in this aphorism we also witness him dramatically altering his stance with respect to the necessity of

⁷³ Burckhardt (1905), p.164.

PDC (*qua* war). Now such conflict is no longer conceived as *releasing* accrued energy, but rather *creating* or *augmenting* it. Thus, we know of no other means, he argues,

wodurch mattwerdenden Völkern jene rauhe Energie des Feldlagers, jener tiefe unpersönliche Hass, jene Mörder-Kaltblütigkeit mit gutem Gewissen, jene gemeinsame organisierende Gluth in der Vernichtung des Feindes, [...] ebenso stark und sicher mitgetheilt werden könnte, wie diess jeder grosse Krieg thut.

Insofar as it goads individuals into action, war is extolled as a wellspring of socially beneficial energy. Like Burckhardt, Nietzsche maintains that by actively participating in war, a people can foster the amoral warrior virtues (such as a brave and brutal strain of sangfroid) upon which a vibrant culture is founded.⁷⁴ Similarly, in MA 235, Nietzsche posits conditions of social violence as a prerequisite of cultivating genius – it gives them “ihr Feuer, ihre Wärme”. Peace, on the other hand, is conceived as the womb of cultural weakness and mediocrity; hence, asks Nietzsche, “[m]üsste man somit nicht wünschen, dass das Leben seinen gewaltsamen Charakter behalte und dass immer von Neuem wieder wilde Kräfte und Energien hervorgerufen werden?” Again, the criterion of evaluation underlying these aphorisms is that of cultural flourishing, and it is therefore unsurprising that war is described as particularly indispensable for later, more developed societies. Without war, such societies become weary (*matt*), as is evident in modern Europe, according to Nietzsche; echoing Burckhardt’s esteem of crisis, Nietzsche prescribes modern Europe “der grössten und furchtbarsten Kriege” (MA 477).⁷⁵ Whether or not

⁷⁴ MA 477: “Die Cultur kann die Leidenschaften, Laster und Bosheiten durchaus nicht entbehren.” See also Z I Kriegsmänner 4.59, where Nietzsche contrasts the warrior virtue of courage with the Christian virtue of neighbourly love: “Der Krieg und der Muth haben mehr grosse Dinge gethan, als die Nächstenliebe. Nicht euer Mitleiden, sondern eure Tapferkeit rettete bisher die Verunglückten.” See also MA 444.

⁷⁵ In the critical literature, this aspect of Nietzsche’s approach to PDC is perhaps best appreciated by the radically anti-foundationalist Georges Bataille, who is less interested in the underlying naturalistic or metaphysical grounds of violent conflict so much as its valuable iconoclastic effects. For Nietzsche, says Bataille, war *energises* a culture by exploding suffocating social and moral orders: “ces catastrophes lui semblèrent préférables à la

we assent to Nietzsche's (or Burckhardt's) suppositions, it can at least be stated that, now in Nietzsche's middle period, we have once again denuded various justifications of PDC that are profoundly at odds with the agonistic reading.

Before moving on to Nietzsche later writings, it is worth noting that these ideas from the middle period are aligned with current empirical research, which tends to contest hydraulic drive theories of aggression. These theories – typified by Freud and Lorenz – represent inherently violent, destructive energies not only as intrinsic to human nature, but as psychologically accruing like mounting steam pressure in sealed vessel.⁷⁶ According to this them, actively engaging in or watching violent activity ventilates this pressure and returns the individual to a healthy mean. The weight of psychological research, however, counters this thesis. Indeed, empirical studies indicate that neither watching nor participating in violent activity have a cathartic effect. On the contrary, to borrow Plato's phraseology, the empirical evidence supports the idea that such activity “feeds and waters the passions”, rather

stagnation, au mensonge de la vie bourgeoise, de la béatitude des professeurs de morale reçue.” Georges Bataille, “Nietzsche et le national-socialisme” (1937), in *Œuvres Complètes*, 18 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), vol.6, pp.185-8 (p.185). What should also be remarked about Bataille's reading of Nietzsche as pro-war is that it is not only at odds with agonistic interpretations, but is also distinctly opposed to readings of Nietzsche as promoting a murderous proto-fascistic aristocracy resembling that of the blond beasts. In Bataille's words: “il est vain de lui [Nietzsche] prêter quelque intention mesurable en termes de politique électorale, en arguant qu'il parla de 'maîtres du monde'. Il s'agit de sa part d'une évocation hasardée du possible. Cet homme souverain dont il désirait l'éclat, il l'imagina contradictoirement tantôt riche et tantôt plus pauvre qu'un ouvrier, tantôt puissant, tantôt traqué. Il exigea de lui la vertu de tout supporter comme il lui reconnut le droit de transgresser les normes. D'ailleurs, il le distinguait en principe de l'homme au pouvoir. Il ne limitait rien, se bornait à décrire aussi librement qu'il pouvait un champ de possibilités” (ibid., p.186). In contrast to Appel, then, Bataille reads Nietzsche as presenting the “master race” as just one potential ideal in a field of contradictory future possibilities. According to Bataille, it is Nietzsche's self-appointed task to keep this field of potentiality radically open. We must therefore acknowledge a significant third position in the debate over Nietzsche's normative stance towards physically destructive conflict, one that cannot be reduced to the dichotomy between, on the one hand, agonistic and, on the other, murderous or militaristic, aristocratic readings. For more on Bataille's anti-fascistic reading of Nietzsche, see “Nietzsche et les Fascistes” in *Œuvres Complètes*, 18 vols (Paris, Gallimard, 1973), vol.1 (esp. pp.452-3).

⁷⁶ See e.g. Sigmund Freud, “Das Unbehagen in der Kultur”, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 17 vols ([London: Imago, 1940-1952] and [Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1966]), vol.14, pp.419-506. See also Konrad Lorenz, *Das Sogenannten Böse: Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression* (München: Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998).

than giving vent to them.⁷⁷ Engaging in, or watching, violent behaviour *increases* the chance of further violent behaviour rather than allaying violent inclinations.⁷⁸ Furthermore, while humans seem to have certain instincts that make them prone to aggressive modes of behaviour, the bulk of violence research suggests that homicidal behaviour is *learnt*, and therefore in no way compelled by a “natural”, let alone unstoppably accreting, drive.⁷⁹

Nietzsche’s position in MA 477 nevertheless goes beyond these theories in two important ways: first, for Nietzsche, engaging in violence does not just further stimulate propensities for such behaviour, but also stimulates the individual and society in a more general manner. Second, and directly following from this, unlike these contemporary critiques of catharsis theory, Nietzsche sees the stimulation resulting from certain forms of violent behaviour as a *desideratum*. Nevertheless, even in MA 477, Nietzsche is not entirely affirmative of the energising effects of war. He warns that the flood of energy that bursts forth with warfare can in fact devastate tender, under-developed cultures.⁸⁰ As such, in MA, not only has Nietzsche evidently abandoned Schopenhauerian metaphysics in reconceptualising PDC, but his affirmative normative stance has also become generally more nuanced as compared with CV 3: war is no longer posited as a metaphysical necessity, but

⁷⁷ See Plato, *Republic*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 606c-e. Plato, it should be noted, is specifically referring to the effects of poetry.

⁷⁸ For a comprehensive survey of the current literature on cathartic theories of aggression, see R. Baumeister and B. Bushman, “Emotions and Aggressiveness”, in Wilhelm Heitmeyer and John Hagan (eds.), *International Handbook of Violence Research* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2007), pp.479-494 (esp. pp.485-7).

⁷⁹ J. Kivivuori, J. Savolainen and P. Danielsson, “Theory and Explanation in European Homicide Research”, in Marieke C. A. Liem and William Alex Pridemore (eds.), *Handbook of European Homicide Research: Patterns, Explanations and Country Studies* (New York: Springer, 2011), pp.95-110 (see esp. pp.105-9).

⁸⁰ See MA 477, where Nietzsche talks of the “hervorbrechenden Bächen und Strömen” caused by war, “welche freilich Steine und Unrath aller Art mit sich wälzen und die Wiesen zarter Culturen zu Grunde richten”. Indeed, we also uncover staunchly negative appraisals of PDC (especially war) before, during and after the middle period. For the early period see e.g. GT 15 1.100 or UB I 1.160; for the middle period, see e.g. MA 480, VM 320 and WS 284; for the late period, see e.g. AC 48; NL 9[126] 12.410; 14[182] 13.369; 15[38] 13.438. For further references, see Niemeyer (2009).

rather as an instrumental requirement for social vitality, *in some cases*. Yet, if a culture is to survive in the long-run, recurrent military conflict is indispensable. There can be no Kantian “perpetual peace”, only a constant oscillation between the contented stability of peace and the rousing fervour of war. We should now ask whether the same can be said in the context of Nietzsche’s later writings.

1.4. THE LATER NIETZSCHE ON *VERNICHTUNGSKAMPF*

I will now argue that Nietzsche’s later thoughts on PDC can be divided into two distinct subsets. The first regresses to the cathartic model developed in CV 3, while the second explicitly develops the ontology presupposed by the agonal transformative project. I will now analyse these consecutively in an effort to show that while the later Nietzsche may open up an ontological space of possibility for agonal transformation, he nonetheless both conceptualises and valorises PDC in a manner that is incompatible with the agonistic reading.

1.4.1. GM, “EIGENTLICHE AKTIVITÄT” AND THE RETURN TO CATHARSIS

On the basis of GM I 11, Frederick Appel has asserted that an unrefined, raw discharge of physically destructive energy was considered imperative by the later Nietzsche.⁸¹ And certainly, there is a case to be made that the Bernaysian catharsis argument has made a resurgence in GM, particularly in the sketch Nietzsche makes of the noble “blonde Bestien”. Resonating with other aphorisms such as JGB 259, in GM I 11, Nietzsche paints an idealised picture of a community of aristocrats who

⁸¹ See fn.9.

live in a strict form of society based on mutual restraint. Despite this reciprocal moderation, however, these same nobles are said to struggle in an apparently unrestrained manner to exploit, dominate and incorporate those who live beyond the bounds of their rigorous social order. And to be sure, this lack of restraint often manifests itself as PDC. Thus, in their relation to outsiders, the blond beasts enjoy

die Freiheit von allem socialen Zwang, sie halten sich in der Wildniss schadlos für die Spannung, welche eine lange Einschliessung und Einfriedigung in den Frieden der Gemeinschaft giebt, sie treten in die Unschuld des Raubthier-Gewissens zurück, als frohlockende Ungeheuer, welche vielleicht von einer scheusslichen Abfolge von Mord, Niederbrennung, Schändung, Folterung mit einem Übermuth und seelischen Gleichgewichte davongehen [...]. Auf dem Grunde aller dieser vornehmen Rassen ist das Raubthier, die prachtvolle nach Beute und Sieg lüstern schweifende blonde Bestie nicht zu verkennen; *es bedarf für diesen verborgenen Grund von Zeit zu Zeit der Entladung, das Thier muss wieder heraus, muss wieder in die Wildniss zurück [...].* (GM I 11 5.275; my italics)

We have, again echoing the Bernaysian catharsis argument, a potentially pathological build-up and a subsequent need for periodic, unrefined discharge, which takes the form of a physical *Vernichtungskampf* (against those considered foreign).⁸² What is also implied in this depiction is the idea that such outbursts reinstate a condition of healthy equilibrium. These immoderate eruptions are affirmed by Nietzsche as innocent, irrepressible expressions of strength. Indeed, only two sections later, he compares these violent discharges to the innocent necessity with which an eagle kills the lambs it needs to survive, or with which a lightning bolt flashes.⁸³ Just as the lightning bolt simply *is* the flash, the nobles simply *are* these callous forms of activity, possessing no substantial self, let alone a libertarian free will, by dint of which they could be held morally accountable. The

⁸² On the potentially pathological consequences of over-accumulation, see GM II 11 5.312, where, in the case of the ascetic, this destructive impetus eventually releases internally due to a lack of external outlets. Compare also JGB 76.

⁸³ See GM I 13 5.278-9.

destructive urges of the nobles therefore cannot and should not be kept in a state of perpetual restraint (“das Thier muss wieder heraus”).

But on what grounds is this necessity posited? In GM, what we see is that the essentially destructive metaphysical will, which necessitated PDC in CV 3, has been replaced by an immanent account of *life* (“Leben”) as necessarily destructive. Nietzsche asserts that life “nämlich in seinen Grundfunktionen verletzend, vergewaltigend, ausbeutend, *vernichtend* fungirt und gar nicht gedacht werden kann ohne diesen Charakter” (GM II 11 5.312; my italics). This can also be taken as one way in which Nietzsche conceives of life as “will to power” – namely, as a brutal, eruptive and destructive struggle for assimilation, growth and expansion. What motivates this peculiar description of life is Nietzsche’s desire to reveal how, although exploitation and destructive conflict may be *locally* inhibited (through the imposition of law e.g.), this is only ever as a means to forming greater unities of power (*Macht-Einheiten*), better able to brutally struggle against *other* opposed entities.⁸⁴ As such, these fundamental biological processes (or *Grundfunktionen*) can only ever be *displaced* (but never wholly negated).⁸⁵ To pursue their universal suppression, as Nietzsche believes Christianity is guilty of doing, is to pursue an actively hostile relation to life.⁸⁶ Humans are therefore naturally (i.e. psychologically and physiologically) bound to engage in PDC since they cannot but embody these *Grundfunktionen* – expressing them as individuals, social groups or even ascetically against themselves.

The Bernaysian catharsis model was found to be conditioned by the existence of some distinctly destructive energy that irrevocably accretes. In GM,

⁸⁴ Compare AC 58 6.245-7.

⁸⁵ See GM II 12 5.312: “Rechtszustände immer nur Ausnahme-Zustände sein dürfen, als theilweise Restriktionen des eigentlichen Lebenswillens, der auf Macht aus ist, und sich dessen Gesamtzwecke als Einzelmittel unterordnend: nämlich als Mittel, grössere Macht-Einheiten zu schaffen.”

⁸⁶ Although N.B. that insofar as both Christianity and its secular descendants rapaciously pursue mastery over their opponents and even life itself, they paradoxically embody the very characteristics of life as will to power against which they are ostensibly struggling. See e.g. GM III 11 5.362-3.

though the will to power is first and foremost described as a will to more power, it is at least in part conceived as just such a kind of energy. As we have seen, will to power is portrayed as having an ineradicably destructive component, which at the level of human existence demands periodic release in PDC. In GM, however, Nietzsche situates this energy immanently within life itself, rather than in the noumenal realm of the will. In this way, he can be said to have replaced the “*metaphysical* reflection” argument with a “*naturalistic* reflection” argument, which can be expressed as follows:

The Naturalistic Reflection Argument

1. All living entities are necessarily characterised by will to power;
2. Will to power is necessarily characterised by destructive conflictual relations;
3. Humans are living entities;
4. Therefore, humans are necessarily characterised by destructive conflictual relations.

One would be hard put to deny that Nietzsche has to some extent reverted in GM to the (albeit now naturalised) Bernaysian catharsis argument. But should we take this as evidence of a substantive reprisal of the position he implicitly rejected in MA? And does this not problematize his transformative project in the same way CV 3 did – that is, insofar as it indicates that (at least after a certain point) we can only displace, but not transform, destructive tendencies? The ontological obstacle of immutability has once again reared its problematic head. My contention, however, is that this text should be treated as anomalous and therefore cannot be taken as evidence for Nietzsche having made a wholesale reversion to the Bernaysian catharsis argument.

The first reason for treating these texts as anomalous is that in no other enumeration of the *Grundfunktionen* of life does Nietzsche mention destruction; rather, these consistently underscore the functions of overpowering, exploitation,

instrumentalisation and domination.⁸⁷ It is these, I would argue, that best capture what the later Nietzsche holds to be the ultimately ineluctable aspects of life, nature and the world as will to power. Crucially, as I will claim in the following subsection, these do not necessarily have to be expressed in PDC.

Second, in GM, as Marco Brusotti has noted, Nietzsche is principally opposing himself to Eugene Dühring's theory that the concept of justice originated in the desire for revenge, which reactively follows our suffering of an injury.⁸⁸ Nietzsche saw Dühring (among others) as representative of a wider tendency within the human sciences to give explanatory priority to the reactive sentiments (e.g. "Hass, Neid, Missgunst, Argwohn, Rancune, Rache"). Further, Nietzsche argues that because these thinkers are caught in the spirit of Christian *ressentiment*, they tendentiously view the world through the lens of reactivity.⁸⁹ In opposition to this, Nietzsche wants to introduce a new *Grundbegriff* to the sciences (biology and physiology in particular), namely, that of "eigentliche Aktivität".⁹⁰ He endeavours to illumine affects other than those based in reactivity – affects he holds to be of "höheren biologischen Werthe": "die eigentlich aktiven Affekte, wie Herrschsucht, Habsucht und dergleichen".⁹¹ Nietzsche strives to represent nobility and freedom as being distinguished by such "activity". Unlike the weak and the slavish, they act with spontaneity and aggression, which Nietzsche defines as the essential characteristics of life itself, that is, of will to power. Nietzsche's nobles are not prone to brooding and protracted periods of resentment that culminate in calculated acts of vengeance; they are an outpouring of aggressive, unrestrained, and as we have seen, at times necessarily *destructive*, force. If they do react, they do so *immediately*,

⁸⁷ See NL I[30] 12.17; NL 40[7] 11.631; JGB 259.

⁸⁸ See GM II 11 5.310-3; GM III 14 5.370. See also Marco Brusotti, "Reagieren, schwer reagieren, nicht reagieren. Zu Philosophie und Physiologie beim letzten Nietzsche", *Nietzsche-Studien*, 41 (2012), 104-126 (see p.106 and p.126).

⁸⁹ See GM II 11 5.310: "Worauf ich allein aufmerksam mache, ist der Umstand, dass es der Geist des Ressentiment selbst ist, aus dem diese neue Nuance von wissenschaftlicher Billigkeit (zu Gunsten von Hass, Neid, Missgunst, Argwohn, Rancune, Rache) herauswächst."

⁹⁰ See GM II 11 5.310 and 12 5.315-6.

⁹¹ GM II 11 5.310.

without being poisoned by *ressentiment*. When not immediate in this manner, reactivity becomes life-denial (since life just *is* spontaneous activity).

As Brusotti remarks, it is largely in opposition to Dühring that Nietzsche sets up the active–reactive dichotomy from which thinkers such as Deleuze have gotten so much philosophical mileage. Brusotti persuasively argues, however, that Nietzsche abandons this opposition after GM. Upon reading the works of the psychiatrist Charles Féré in 1888, Nietzsche came to realise that instantaneous reaction was symptomatic of the sick and neurotic.⁹² What characterises the strong is not the kind of unrestrained, automatic and spontaneous discharge we see the blond beasts destructively unleashing upon outsiders, but rather slow, deliberate reaction.⁹³ Hence, Nietzsche is (ironically) reactively forced into making this extreme characterisation of will to power and freedom as immediate and aggressive “actual activity” due to his opposition to Dühring, which falls into the background after 1888.

The third reason for treating Nietzsche’s description of PDC in GM as an exception becomes obvious once we probe the rhetorical status of the blond beast. Charitable readings have tried to argue that the figure is either a caricature of evil from the perspective of the slaves, or a mere symbol of unrestrained passion.⁹⁴ While this human type is not easily reduced to a merely chimerical or symbolic status, there is textual evidence to support the idea that the blond beast functions as a rhetorical

⁹² See Brusotti (2012), pp.115-7; see also Marco Brusotti “Nachweis aus Charles Féré, *Dégénérescence et Criminalité* (1888), *Nietzsche-Studien*, 20 (2011) 342; see also Charles Samson Féré, *Dégénérescence et Criminalité* (Paris: Alcan, 1888).

⁹³ See NL 14[102] 13.279.

⁹⁴ Lawrence Hatab suggests that the depiction of the blond beast in GM is a caricature of the raiding barbarians as viewed from the perspective of the slaves. See Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.48-9. Walter Kaufmann (1974) on the other hand, claims that the blond beasts function as “ideograms for the conception of unsublimated animal passion” and asserts that “Nietzsche does not glorify [...] them” (p.225). Along with these, we should also recall Bataille’s argument against literal readings of Nietzsche’s entreaties for an aristocratic master race. For Bataille, this figure merely represents one among many hypothetical future exemplars sketched by Nietzsche in his effort to describe “aussi librement qu’il pouvait un champ de possibilités” (see fn.75).

device – i.e. as a polemical character (or caricature) akin to the men in the state of nature envisioned by Hobbes and Rousseau.

In the relevant passages, Nietzsche complains that Europeans have lost their fear of man. Consequently, Nietzsche continues, they have also lost their love and admiration of man.⁹⁵ We no longer have any sense of reverence for humans on account of the fact that we find ourselves surrounded by mediocre, sick individuals (“Missrathenen, Verkleinerten, Verkümmerten, Vergifteten”). Nietzsche’s disdain for this mediocre human type in many ways recalls his fear of a future dominated by the figure of the “last human” (“der letzte Mensch”) – a form of herd-animal, the ideal utilitarian citizen, perfectly socialised and highly skilled at surviving, yet no longer able to develop and augment himself.⁹⁶ In *Z*, Nietzsche contrasts his dystopian vision of the last human with his hope for a future ruled by the *Übermensch*.⁹⁷ Analogously, in *GM*, the mediocre man of the present is contrasted with the blond beast. But can the *Übermensch* therefore be equated with the blond beast (as Detlef Brennecke has claimed, for example⁹⁸). Should we think of a world governed by blond beasts as Nietzsche’s aspiration?

There are good reasons against our making either of these assumptions. First, the only mention of the *Übermensch* in *GM* is in relation to Napoleon, but even he is not described as an *Übermensch* through and through. He is instead labelled a “Synthesis von Unmensch und Übermensch”, which strongly implies that his brutish and beastly (i.e. *unmenschlich*) traits are not part of his *Übermenschlichkeit* (*GM* I 16 5.288). Moreover, Nietzsche’s examples of blond beasts are mostly historical – for instance, the ancient Greeks and the Vikings (*GM*

⁹⁵ See *GM* I 11 5.275f.

⁹⁶ See *Z* I Vorrede 5 4.19-20.

⁹⁷ On the opposition of the last human and the *Übermensch*, see *NL* 4[171] 10.162. See also *Z* IV Vom höheren Menschen 3 4.358, where Nietzsche warns that “diese kleinen Leute: die sind des Übermenschen grösste Gefahr!”

⁹⁸ See Detlef Brennecke, “Die Blonde Bestie. Vom Mißverständnis eines Schlagworts”, *Nietzsche-Studien*, 5 (1976), pp.113-145. See also Gerd Schank, “Nietzsche’s Blond Beast”, in *Nietzsche’s Bestiary: Becoming Animal beyond Docile and Brutal*, Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora (eds.) (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp.140–55.

I 11 5.275) – whereas he explicitly states in Z that “Niemals noch gab es einen Übermenschen” (Z II Von den Priestern 4.119).⁹⁹ Finally, when he does look to the past for exemplars, he certainly does not limit himself to blond beasts, often preferring to invoke artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Homer and Goethe.¹⁰⁰ It is therefore unjustifiable to reduce the *Übermensch* to the violent, murderous figure of the blond beast.¹⁰¹ Even in GM, Nietzsche qualifies his esteem for the behaviour of the blond beasts, warning that “Man mag im besten Rechte sein, wenn man vor der blonden Bestie auf dem Grunde aller vornehmen Rassen die Furcht nicht los wird und auf der Hut ist” (GM I 11 5.277).

The blond beast’s function becomes plain when we take into consideration what Nietzsche was trying to achieve in these sections of GM: to give himself and his readers “Einen Blick nur auf etwas Vollkommenes, zu-Ende-Gerathenes, Glückliches, Mächtiges, Triumphirendes, an dem es noch Etwas zu fürchten giebt!” (GM I 12 5.278). He also endeavours to bring into relief how such terrifying, amoral behaviour is perfectly compatible with, and even forms the basis of, higher culture (hence his classifying the Athenians among the blond beasts). Nietzsche thereby rejects the myth that the purpose of culture is to transform man from the blond beast into “ein zahmes und civilisirtes Thier” (GM I 11 5.276).

The blond beast therefore evidently functions as a rhetorical device principally conceived as a means to arousing an energising sense of awe. With this polemical character, he hopes to illuminate (by juxtaposition) not just the feebleness of modern Europeans, but also the contingency of our currently being in this lamentable condition. Nonetheless, in spite of Nietzsche’s valorising register, it is not an ideal for which he encourages us to strive.¹⁰² It is an image designed to enliven

⁹⁹ Quoted in Paolo Stellino, *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: On the Verge of Nihilism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), p.196.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. JGB 200 and NL 9[157] 12.428.

¹⁰¹ See Stellino (2015), pp.196ff. Compare also Patrick Wotling, *Nietzsche et le Problème de la Civilisation* (Paris: PUF, 2009), p.291.

¹⁰² A note that supports Appel and Brennecke, however, is NL 11[31] 13.18, though even here Nietzsche’s call appears to be for a *temporary* group of ruling barbarians who can act as a means to a more cultivated future ideal.

his readers and open their eyes to the possibility of constructing alternative ideals. We would also do well to avoid reading his description of their behaviour as an account of how will to power is necessarily or best expressed in human forms of life – that is, through inhibition, followed by necessarily destructive and unrestrained cathartic releases. In GM, as I have construed it, he only foregrounds the violence of the blond beasts in order to elicit the aforementioned galvanising fear and remind us of our brutal ancestry.¹⁰³

For these reasons, though there is undeniably some reversion to the Bernaysian catharsis argument employed in CV 3, I submit that we read this as an exceptional case. While we should therefore not associate the later Nietzsche with his earlier cathartic model of PDC, it is imperative that we remark that the notion of energetic discharge nonetheless plays a fundamental and widespread role in his later writings, albeit not in the way suggested by GM I 11; indeed, we should now examine Julius Robert Mayer’s influence on Nietzsche, since this will give us an insight into how Nietzsche’s broader conception of discharge actually underwent an important shift in the 1880s.

1.4.2. GROUNDING THE TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECT: J. R. MAYER ON *AUSLÖSUNG* (1881-89)

As of 1881, Mayer’s concept of “Auslösung” (i.e. “release” or “discharge”) comes to play a leading role within Nietzsche’s philosophy. The influence of Mayer’s conception of discharge can be traced back to when Peter Gast sent Nietzsche a copy of Mayer’s *Über Auslösung* (1876).¹⁰⁴ In this text, Mayer posits two species of causal relation: the first describes cases in which a given cause is equal to its effect (in obvious accordance with the principle of the conservation of energy, also developed by Mayer). He hypothesises, however, that there is a species of causal relation that

¹⁰³ Again, the same might be said for GD Alten 3 6.157.

¹⁰⁴ See letter to Heinrich Köselitz 16.04.1881 (KGB III/1, pp.84-5).

cannot be subsumed under this category; namely, that in which a cause triggers a chain reaction, or the (often sudden) release of a large quantity of stored up energy, as in an explosion. The energy invested in the action of pulling the trigger of a gun, for example, seems to be far outweighed by the energy thereby released in the firing of the bullet. While this is merely characteristic of “sehr viele” natural processes (“Naturprozesse”) according to Mayer, he deems the living, organic world to be “an einen ununterbrochenen Auslösungsprozeß geknüpft”.¹⁰⁵ In humans, for example, a nerve impulse represents a weak motor activity capable of triggering disproportionately great muscular movements. When measured and not overstepping precise boundaries (“gewisse Grenzen”), these *internal Auslösungen* produce a pleasurable sensation. This is evinced by the enjoyment we take in exercising our muscles through recreational sport, says Mayer. This pleasant sensation, Mayer continues, is closely connected to the feeling of health insofar as both index “einen ungestörten Auslösungsapparat”.¹⁰⁶

Mayer also claims that humans take similar pleasure in triggering *external Auslösungen* – in firing guns for example. Finally, he also points to “Auslösungen verbrecherischer Art”, speculating that

wäre unserer Planet so beschaffen, das es jedem möglich wäre, denselben wie ein mit Dynamit gefülltes Gefäß auseinanderzusprenge, so würden sich sicher zu jeder Zeit Leute genug finden, bereit, mit Aufopferung ihres eigenen Lebens unsere schöne Erde in den Weltraum explodieren zu lassen [...].¹⁰⁷

What should be observed, however, is that according to this argument, the urge humans feel to bring about destructive discharge is not due to a build-up of an intrinsically destructive drive or species of energy, nor is it motivated by any

¹⁰⁵ Julius Robert Mayer, *Über Auslösung*, in *Die Mechanik der Wärme. Gesammelten Schriften* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1893), pp.440-6 (p.442). For a comprehensive review of Mayer's influence on Nietzsche, see also Alwin Mittasch, *Nietzsche als Naturphilosoph* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kroner Verlag, 1952), pp.114ff.

¹⁰⁶ Mayer (1893), p.443.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.446.

anticipated pleasure in the destructive aspect of the act *per se* (Mayer's project implies that we would have no interest in destroying the world if we had to do so with spades over the course of millennia); it is rather due to the anticipated pleasure in causing *a disproportionate release of energy*, which is only contingently associated with such explosively destructive actions.

Though Nietzsche rejects the atomism he identifies in Mayer, this conception of *Auslösung* forms the cornerstone of his later conceptions of action, the affects, and the will to power.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Nietzsche now describes the fundamental natural process as that of *Auslösung*: “vor allem will etwas Lebendiges seine Kraft auslassen”.¹⁰⁹ Of equal importance, though, is the accumulation of energy or force. For Nietzsche, geniuses and stronger human types are distinguished from weaker types insofar as they inherit or are able to store up greater quantities of force.¹¹⁰ He directly opposes this idea to Darwin's notion of a drive for self-preservation, the logic of which, Nietzsche implies, cannot account for this ostensibly useless and even suicidal discharging of force (Mayer's “Dr. Strangelove” example elegantly illustrates this incompatibility with the logic of self-preservation).¹¹¹ As such, the will to power does not designate a process whereby entities merely accrue power *in potentia*, but includes the subsequent process of releasing or discharging such potential – that is, power *in actu*.¹¹²

While there is, as with the Bernaysian catharsis model, a certain *demand* for discharge according to this formulation of the will to power, engaging in PDC is neither metaphysically nor naturalistically necessitated. Even in 1883 (i.e. before his brief reversion to the Bernaysian catharsis argument), Nietzsche states that such

¹⁰⁸ On Nietzsche rejection of Mayer's atomism, see letter to Heinrich Köselitz 20.03.1882 (KGB III/1, pp.182-3).

¹⁰⁹ NL 2[63] 12.89; see also NL 27[3] 11.275 and JGB 13.

¹¹⁰ See GD Streifzüge 44 6.145-6 and NL 10[165] 12.553.

¹¹¹ NL 2[63] 12.89.

¹¹² See NL 11[114] 13.54, where it can be observed that both the inheriting and discharging of power are key to Nietzsche's conception of strength; see also NL 15[78] 13.455 or JGB 208 for Nietzsche's application of this discharge model to the realm of human socio-political practice.

stores of energy can, as Mayer indicates, be ventilated through a gamut of different activities:

[...] Ein und dieselbe Kraftgefühls-Menge kann sich auf tausend Weisen entladen: dies ist “Freiheit des Willens” — das Gefühl, daß im Verhältniß zu der nothwendigen Explosion hundert von Handlungen gleich gut dienen. Das Gefühl einer gewissen Beliebigkeit der Handlung in Betreff dieser Spannungs-Erleichterung. (NL 7[77] 10.268)

For Nietzsche, as for Mayer, there is always an array of behaviours through which this abstract, polymorphous force can obtain release. Thus, in one note from 1887, when he has more fully formulated his notion of the world as will to power, Nietzsche refers to the many “Ausdrucksweisen und Metamorphosen des Einen Willens [...], der allem Geschehen inhärrt, der Wille zur Macht”, which he characterises as a “Stärker-werden-wollen” (NL 11[96] 13.44). At the level of human behaviour, the discharge of this will to power can take an infinitude of forms: for example, just as we have seen that it can discharge itself in PDC, or as we will witness in later chapters, socio-political oppression, it can equally obtain release in artistic expression.¹¹³ Within this account of *Auslösung*, we might say that physically destructive behaviour would be reduced to the status of a merely *possible* (though nonetheless probable) corollary of the release of power – just as was the case with the individuals Mayer theorised would detonate the earth if given the chance, the urge is one towards release, not PDC. While this opens up a logical space for agonism – since it allows for the apparently unlimited channelling of energy away from PDC – Nietzsche still acknowledges, albeit in an aphorism from 1881 (before he had conceptualised the will to power), that such accrued energy is, *de facto*, often released through impulsive, violent acts:

¹¹³ NL 7[3] 12.256: “Man muß den Künstler selbst nehmen: und dessen Psychologie (die Kritik des Spieltriebs, als Auslassen von Kraft, Lust am Wechsel, am Eindringen der eigenen Seele, der absolute Egoismus des Künstlers usw.)”

Das Böse der Stärke. — Die Gewaltthätigkeit als Folge der Leidenschaft, zum Beispiel des Zornes, ist physiologisch als ein Versuch zu verstehen, einem drohenden Erstickungsanfall vorzubeugen. Zahllose Handlungen des Übermuths, der sich an anderen Personen auslässt, sind Ableitungen eines plötzlichen Blutandranges durch eine starke Muskel-Action gewesen: und vielleicht gehört das ganze “Böse der Stärke” unter diesen Gesichtspunct.
(M 371)¹¹⁴

Violence is explained and demoralised by Nietzsche insofar as he describes it as a means of attaining cathartic release. Such actions are not evil, he assures us, but merely the result of an immediate need to release (*auslassen*) pent-up energy in order to avert a condition analogous to suffocation. In a similar manner, Nietzsche seems to think that the *de facto* way in which nations often actually pursue power expansion is through wars of aggression:

Es gehört zum Begriff des Lebendigen, daß es wachsen muß, — daß es seine Macht erweitert und folglich fremde Kräfte in sich hineinnehmen muß. [...] Eine Gesellschaft, die endgültig und ihrem Instinkt nach den Krieg und die Eroberung abweist, ist im Niedergang (NL 14[192] 13.378).

This realist argument would appear to naturalise, explain, demoralise and even encourage PDC in a way that is largely at odds with the idea within the agonistic reading that Nietzsche was strongly opposed to such conflict.

¹¹⁴ M 371. See also See also GD Alten 3 6.157: “[...] Ich sah ihren [die alten Griechen] stärksten Instinkt, den Willen zur Macht, ich sah sie zittern vor der unbändigen Gewalt dieses Triebs, – ich sah alle ihre Institutionen wachsen aus Schutzmaassregeln, um sich vor einander gegen ihren inwendigen Explosivstoff sicher zu stellen. Die ungeheure Spannung im Innern entlud sich dann in furchtbarer und rücksichtsloser Feindschaft nach Aussen: die Stadtgemeinden zerfleischten sich unter einander, damit die Stadtbürger jeder einzelnen vor sich selber Ruhe fänden. [...]” Though Nietzsche appears to be working with the Bernaysian catharsis model here, later in the same text he indicates that this energy could also be expressed through the agon. PDC was just one unrefined means the state used to release its excessively pent-up energy. Compare also GD Sokrates 8 and GD Streifzüge 23, where Nietzsche indicates that even within the agon itself, the striving for dominance could be transformed from physical contest into spiritual, philosophical contest.

Despite the fact that Nietzsche does not explicitly refer to *Auslösung* in the context of his post-1881 thoughts on war, there is nonetheless telling evidence that Mayer's theory had a decisive impact on these thoughts. For example, in FW, where Nietzsche cautions us against accusing pacific cultures of laxity. Beneath this veneer of lassitude, he tells us,

jene alte Volks-Energie und Volks-Leidenschaft, welche durch den Krieg und die Kampfspiele eine prachtvolle Sichtbarkeit bekam, jetzt sich in unzählige Privat-Leidenschaften umgesetzt hat und nur weniger sichtbar geworden ist; ja, wahrscheinlich ist in Zuständen der "Corruption" die Macht und Gewalt der jetzt verbrauchten Energie eines Volkes grösser, als je, und das Individuum giebt so verschwenderisch davon aus, wie es ehemals nicht konnte, — es war damals noch nicht reich genug dazu! (FW 23)

This picture of once destructive, though now productively modulated, energies is at odds with the ontologies of PDC constructed in CV 3 and GM. But perhaps more interestingly, this aphorism also represents a change of tack from MA 477. In those cultures that have lost their taste for war, though they may *prima facie* appear weary or lax, closer scrutiny reveals that their combative energy, far from having disappeared, has rather been canalised into other pursuits – a process he unambiguously praises as a facilitator of knowledge. (It is this converted ["umgesetzt"] energy that enabled "die Flamme der Erkenntniss lichterloh zum Himmel [aufzuschlagen]" within these superficially languid cultures.) This aphorism therefore presents us with a dynamic that resembles a zero-sum struggle for energy fought between a nation's martial and cultural undertakings.¹¹⁵

This idea is also present in the writings from the end of Nietzsche's working life. In one of his final notes from 1888/89, presciently entitled "Letzte Erwägung", we can see that even at this late stage in his career, Nietzsche maintained a view of war far more compatible with Mayer's notion of *Auslösung* than with the Bernaysian catharsis model:

¹¹⁵ An idea that is prefigured in UB I (see UB I 1 1.160f).

Könnten wir der Kriege entrathen, um so besser. Ich wüßte einen nützlicheren Gebrauch von den zwölf Milliarden zu machen, welche jährlich der bewaffnete Friede Europa kostet; es giebt noch andre Mittel, die Physiologie zu Ehren zu bringen, als durch Lazarethe... (NL 25[19] 13.646)

Notwithstanding the subjunctive mood (“[k]önnten wir”), dispensing with war altogether remains a conceivable possibility for Nietzsche. Furthermore, eradicating war, and thereby freeing up millions of men usually engaged in standing armies, would allow their energy to be directed toward better ends – for example, as he mentions in a paraphrased version of this note, toward “die grandiose und hohe Arbeit des Lebens” (NL 25[14] 13.644). As such, the later Nietzsche can be said to promote the transformation of our collective behaviour from *Krieg* to cultural perfectionism in a manner that reverberates with the dynamic presaged in CV 5. The physically destructive relation of humans to one another is therefore possible (and even probable), but not necessary – humans can affirm and embody the *Grundfunktionen* of life without need of war and murder, and it generates no contradiction to conceive of human life as unburdened of these.

1.5. CONCLUSION

Despite the continued presence of an agonal impulse throughout Nietzsche’s writings, it should nonetheless now be evident that we must reject the claim that his attitude toward PDC is best described as denigratory and primarily concerned with its transformation. This position has been undermined on two fronts. The first regards the modal status of PDC in his philosophy – namely, that at two points he suggests that PDC is a *necessary* aspect of human existence. This necessity is expressed in two different ways, depending on the phase under examination: the early work CV 3 presenting PDC as *metaphysically* necessary; the later work GM presenting it as *naturally* necessary. We began by expounding the conception of

PDC underlying Nietzsche's early affirmation of war in CV 3. Within this, such conflict was seen to be metaphysically necessitated by an immutably destructive and incessantly accreting drive demanding periodic release in war. This cathartic theory of violence was found to be grounded in an amalgam of Schopenhauerian metaphysics and the model of energetic economy found in Bernays' reading of Aristotle. We then saw Nietzsche somewhat anomalously revive the same dynamic in GM; following his apostasy from Schopenhauerian metaphysics, however, we saw him reformulate this theory on naturalistic grounds. On account of the fact that CV 3 and GM posit the existence of a quantum of energy that *must* release itself as PDC and that will always be impervious to qualitative transformation, the ontological view underpinning these texts was seen to contradict the idea proposed by the agonistic readers that Nietzsche sought the complete transformation of PDC. The problem is trenchant: there are texts that actually entail the *impossibility* of the agonal project with respect to certain forms of destructive behaviour, which are posited as essential to thriving human life (i.e. episodic outbursts of PDC). Indeed, the normative cost of assenting to ontologies of destructive conflict resembling those we find in CV 3 or GM I 11 is that we (potentially inadvertently) sacrifice the idea of transformation as a coherent or even conceivable possibility. Due to their practical repercussions, it would therefore serve us well to be particularly chary of hypotheses postulating any intrinsically destructive tendencies as essential to either human psychology or the wider natural world.

Nonetheless, I have tried to demonstrate how we can ring-fence these intractable texts (particularly CV 3 and GM I 11), and to argue that Nietzsche's mature position is best (though not exhaustively) understood as the naturalist-realist account of PDC that he develops out of Burckhardt and Mayer. According to this, no essentially destructive drive is posited, and PDC is regarded as the contingent consequence of a polymorphous impetus toward power – an ontology of PDC that is perfectly congruent with his project of agonal transformation. However, even within this position, PDC is posited as a highly probable part of human existence.

This brings us to the second major problem for the agonistic reading, which concerns the normative value that Nietzsche attributes to PDC. Whereas the agonistic readers suggest that Nietzsche is critical of PDC, and that this forms the basis of his calls for its transformation, it has now been demonstrated at length that he affirms PDC for an array of reasons. Despite the diversity exhibited by these justifications for PDC, they can roughly be split into two groups. The first group are founded on the presupposition that the energy associated with PDC is immutable, which suggest that compressing the expression of this energy into short term bursts is a precondition of social life and the forms of higher culture associated therewith. There is then the idea, also founded on this presupposition, that engaging in PDC represents a hale expression of power and freedom. The second group, however, is in no way premised on a notion of PDC *qua* discharge. Based on realist observations, which it appears he inherited from Burckhardt, Nietzsche suggests that PDC has a regenerative effect on culture – clearing away outdated cultural practices and fostering the cultivation of warrior virtues.

Another finding that should be underscored is that MA 477 presented us with an account of PDC that contradicts both the Bernays and the Mayer inspired discharge ontologies. In this aphorism, PDC is figured as having an *energising* rather than a ventilating effect. Indeed, in his post-metaphysical phase, Nietzsche offers us perspectives from which PDC can be understood both as a *source* of energy as well as a locus for its discharge.

It should be further added, that in this chapter I have by no means exhausted Nietzsche treatment of the sources and justifications for PDC. First, throughout his oeuvre, he attributes this species of conflict to a motley of other sources: in GT, for example, one cause of PDC is the unrestrained pursuit of egoistic ends;¹¹⁶ and in AC, he traces it back to God's (and priests') desire to keep man divided and distracted from science ("Wissenschaft").¹¹⁷ Interestingly, though, we do not find competition

¹¹⁶ GT 15 1.100.

¹¹⁷ AC 48 6.226-7.

over a scarcity of resources among these (except in Nietzsche's citation of WWV in PHG), such as Schopenhauer, and many today, suggest is one of the prime motivating factors for PDC.¹¹⁸ Moreover, what readers may also find glaringly absent from my treatment is Nietzsche's later calls for a "Vernichtung von Millionen Mißrathener" (NL 25[335] 11.98) – what has often been interpreted as a proto-Nazi advocacy of ethnic cleansing. The reason for this absence is that this theme will be explored in depth in Chapter 4.¹¹⁹

It has minimally been demonstrated that both in the early works and thereafter, we bear witness to a multitude of unequivocal affirmations of PDC. In thinking through the preconditions of a strong and vibrant culture, Nietzsche posits war and violence as indispensable means. Nonetheless, he does not do so in an unqualified manner, remaining staunchly critical of forms of PDC that harm culture; thus, even in CV 3 he warns against unrelenting, universal states of war, and in MA 477 he warns of the detrimental effects that wars can have for fledgling cultures. The evaluative criterion used to distinguish between better and worse forms of PDC is cultural health – that is, to what extent do the distinct forms of PDC enable a culture to become a productive whole? In our analysis of CV 5 and MA it was brought to light how Nietzsche employs this same evaluative metric to valorise the agonal transformation of PDC in an apparently generalised manner; notwithstanding, to frame this as representative of his wider thoughts on conflict risks whitewashing over the strong affirmative dimension to his thoughts on PDC. Therefore, although this study has supported the idea that Nietzsche cannot be straightforwardly branded a bellicose thinker, we should nonetheless guard against inversely distorting his thought in reaction to tendentious militaristic readings.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Steven le Blanc, *Constant Battles: Why We Fight* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003).

¹¹⁹ Bruce Detwiler notes this proto-fascistic interpretation in *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.113.