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# Nietzsche and the Size of Future History as a Normative Criterion

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## ABSTRACT

Many critics of morality seem nonetheless committed to a normative stance of some kind. This paper uses the context of Nietzsche studies as a laboratory to experiment with a solution to this problem. I argue that Nietzsche's critique of normativity and his promulgation of normative judgments can be made consistent if we understand Nietzsche as pursuing the criterion of the size of future history. First (§1) I present the problem of normativity as it appears in Nietzsche's work and the literature. Then (§2), I introduce the criterion of the size of future history and show that it addresses the requirements established in §1. I then address some objections to this criterion (§3). Finally, I suggest some applications of this criterion to specific areas of Nietzsche's discourse and to some of our broader normative intuitions (§4). I conclude that the criterion of the size of future history, if well understood, can provide a solution to the problem of normative inescapability.

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## Introduction

Many critics of morality argue that morality is based on falsehoods, but also, somehow, undesirable in a stronger sense. There is something wrong about morality. As is well known, such views exhibit the kind of normative commitment that seems to undermine the main thrust of such critiques. There seems to be what many have called an 'inescapability of normativity' (Dworkin 2011; Enoch 2011; Raz 2012). In this context, the case of Friedrich Nietzsche is instructive. First, he presents a rich and very developed critique of morality that leads him into a critique of normativity altogether. Secondly, he himself scolds himself for falling into the trap of normativity. Third, the problem of normative inescapability has become one of the main foci of recent studies on Nietzsche. In fact, much of the recent literature about

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Nietzsche's work is directly concerned with the tension between the grounds Nietzsche gives for undermining normative claims and the fact that his writings are saturated with the rhetoric of judgment. The rest of the Nietzsche literature is also indirectly connected to the same problem, especially when it focuses on Nietzsche's notion of virtue, his alleged naturalism, his perfectionism, as well as his account of agency, action, and the role of culture. All of this is well known. Independently from the interpretive problem this represents, it also seems to me that it is around this problem that Nietzsche's work and the secondary literature surrounding it can make the greatest contribution to philosophy in general. After all, the kinds of arguments Nietzsche presents both for and against normative judgment are widely endorsed by philosophers and lay people alike, and this tension it seems, is something most philosophers need to contend with in their own ways. There is, additionally, hope on the horizon: Paul Katsafanas' extensive analysis of Nietzsche's constitutivism (Katsafanas 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018a) has opened new perspectives for resolving this issue. This constitutes, I think, three good reasons to return to Nietzsche's problem of normativity. In this paper, I do not articulate Nietzsche's response to this challenge, as I do not find one explicitly stated in his texts. Rather I articulate what I think is a philosophically plausible response to the problem, one that is additionally, consistent at a high level of detail with Nietzsche's texts. My suggestion is the following: the Nietzschean normative stance is consistent if we assign to Nietzsche the view that the normative criterion for value is the size of future history.

In [section 1](#), I examine the constraints that Nietzsche's critique of morality places on any normative discourse, including his own, to establish the requirements they impose on any viable solution. In [section 2](#), I present the criterion of the size of future history as a criterion capable of justifying all of Nietzsche's normative talk whilst complying to the demands established in [section 1](#). In [section 3](#), I deal with some possible objections to this proposal. Finally, in [section 4](#), I briefly outline ways in which this criterion may help us interpret some further areas of Nietzsche's writings.

## The Problem of Normativity

The challenge consists in squaring the fact that Nietzsche allows himself to formulate normative judgments whilst providing arguments that seem to disqualify any normative stance at all. This is a problem that has had many names in the literature (Katsafanas 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018a; Leiter 2006; Richardson 2015; Soll 1994; Schacht 1983, Berkowitz 1996, 30; Fink 2003 etc.), and is related to many other key themes in Nietzsche's own writings (fatalism, Amor Fati, nay-saying and yes-doing, affirmation, self-becoming, and asceticism to name a few). Although this diversity and proliferation of

approaches in the secondary literature serve to show how serious the problem is, it also risks introducing confusions. Let me instead try to reconstruct the problem by returning to Nietzsche's own writings. As far as I can see, he presents two basic arguments (and their multiple versions) for the rejection of normative judgment.

The first argument is mereological: any normative judgment involves that the part (the 'judge') pass judgment over another part (say, an action, an event, a person or a course of action) and this, according to Nietzsche, amounts to judging the whole and therefore, indirectly, oneself (NF—7 [62], 1886). In this sense, passing judgment is self-undermining: 'one is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one is the whole – there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, condemn our being, for that would be to judge, measure, compare, condemn the whole . . . But nothing exists apart from the whole!' (TI, 'Errors' 8, see also TI, 'Morality' 6, and Janaway 2017; see also Richardson 2015, 95).

Another version of the mereological argument concerns the relations between transcendence and immanence: in order to judge an event or to deliberate about any course of action, we need to stand outside the object of our judgment (in some relevant sense of 'outside'). To judge is to entertain a counter-factual attitude before a given state of affairs. It involves that we entertain a scenario that competes with this state of affairs in order to assess its desirability or undesirability (NF-9 [11], Spring-Fall 1887, rev. Spring-Fall 1888). Nietzsche's holism precludes this: although it is true that we do in fact stand outside proposed courses of actions and past events, people and facts, we do not do so in the sense required to support a normative stance. Rather, we stand outside them as parts stand outside other parts, but crucially, they remain parts of the same 'whole.' This doesn't provide the externality necessary for supporting any normative stance. The only alternative would involve establishing a normative ground entirely external to 'the whole' but such an appeal to transcendence falls afoul of Nietzsche's critique of any two-world theory, one of the most consistent features of his philosophy (see in particular, Müller-Lauter 1999; 2021, 155–200), as he states in the passage above: 'Nothing exists apart from the whole!' In short, one can neither judge from inside of the world, nor can one step outside of the world. Judgment seems to be outlawed in principle.

Nietzsche's second argument against the normative stance can be construed as his moral error argument. Moral error theorists typically claim that values are binding only if they are grounded in existing objects, and that such objects do not exist. They conclude that values are not binding. The argument for the claim that the required objects cannot exist is usually one version or another of Mackie's (1977) argument for queer-ness: for Mackie, it is a very queer object which by the mere fact of existing is binding (is and oughts don't seem to connect that way). It has

recently been acknowledged that this line of argument looks very Nietzschean (Hassan 2021; Olson 2014; Robertson 2020). After all, Nietzsche, like Mackie, regards the death of god (which was one such ‘queer’ entity) as undermining morality. But Nietzsche is a special kind of error theorist: unlike Mackie, he does not avail himself of the queerness argument to dismiss these queer entities a priori. His argument, rather, is a posteriori: he points out that if a value is binding because it participates in existence, either it participates in the world which he has called above ‘the whole’ – and therefore cannot do the job of proposing a ground external enough to achieve any normative stance – or it exists in a world that competes with ‘this’ world, and, as I mentioned, Nietzsche has independent arguments against the two-world metaphysics this implies. Nietzsche’s moral error theory, therefore, should be regarded as a version of his critique of transcendence.

The mereological argument and the moral error argument seem to simply outlaw judgment wholesale. Yet, Nietzsche also claims that drawing this conclusion involves committing to some reprehensible quietism, that is, the view that what is is ipso facto justified (see Leiter 2006, 287 for an explicit endorsement of this kind of quietism). Nietzsche’s early discussion of *Amor Fati* (GS, 276, GS 335) definitely possesses some quietist accents. But you will note that they take place before the elaboration of the hypothesis of the will to power and the surrounding ontology of becoming (Richardson 1996). As has been often noted, in the later discussions of both *Amor Fati* and fatalism in general, Nietzsche is at pains to distance himself from quietism (Chouraqui 2015). In fact, Nietzsche not only avails himself of judgmental language but he explicitly rejects the naïve embrace of things as they are (GM III, 24). This makes sense: as Katsafanas has pointed out, quietism has the consequence of censoring any kind of agency and this can hardly be countenanced without contradiction, since it is part of how things are that we act in the world. This leads Nietzsche to the question of theodicy (Came 2017; Haar 1996; Han-Pile 2011; Jaspers 1997; Löwith 2022; Williams 2012)<sup>1</sup>: how can something be real enough to deserve censure, but not real enough to be (ipso facto) justified (for example, as a part of the whole)?

It is visible that these three arguments (the two arguments against normativity and the rejection of quietism) are tightly connected. Taken together, they serve to set down the central challenge for any possible normative talk: any acceptable normative stance will have to avoid both the pitfalls of a two-world theory and the quietist pitfall. In the first case, the difference between what is to be judged and the ground for judgment is too great, in the second, not great enough. So the question of whether normativity can be countenanced comes down to establishing whether there is a middle ground between immanence and transcendence. Let us

call this the requirement of ‘qualified immanence’ (‘qualified’ because it must have room for *some* difference without collapsing into transcendence).

### **The Constitutivist Step**

The challenge of providing the required kind of qualified immanence is daunting, but Nietzsche’s critique of normativity also offers us one clue as to where one is to look if they are to justify adopting any normative stance. Nietzsche’s starting position, as is visible from the passages cited above, is to envisage the question from the point of view of ‘the whole.’ That is to say, Nietzsche thinks of this problem in broadly ontological terms (on Nietzsche’s account of the ‘whole’ as ontology, see Richardson 1996, 84).

As far as I can see, it is along these lines that Paul Katsafanas has approached the problem in his work of the last decade, and this led him to a genuine breakthrough in the form of his application of the constitutivist model (from Korsgaard 1999 and Velleman 2000, cited in Katsafanas 2011) to Nietzsche’s problem of normativity. Katsafanas’ insight is that if we consider that Nietzsche has (or at least experiments with) an ontology of the will to power, we can make progress. If being is a sort of will that we participate in, for us to pursue our own projects is not only inevitable, but also justified. “Here is Katsafanas’ statement (2011, 621, see also Doyle 2019, 152):”

The Nietzschean version of constitutivism is founded upon the idea that our actions are motivated by a distinctive kind of psychological state, the drive. The fact that our actions are drive-motivated turns out to entail that action constitutively aims at overcoming resistance: whenever we will an end, we aim not merely to achieve the end, but also to encounter and overcome resistances that arise in the pursuit of the end. (This is what Nietzsche means by “will to power.”) I will argue that we can use this feature of action to ground normative conclusions about what there is reason to do.

We have good reason to think Katsafanas is on the right track here. Not least because his constitutivist hypothesis is all but explicitly defended by Nietzsche himself, in an unpublished text which, curiously, has not been discussed in any of the literature surrounding this problem (including Katsafanas). There, Nietzsche offers his most succinct statement of the problem of normativity (in its mereological and error theory guises) and he claims that it can be resolved as long as one can countenance the idea that being is will. It is worth citing extensively:

Rare are those who clearly understand what the point of view of *desirability* [Wünschbarkeit] implies, what each “this should be thus, but it isn’t” or even “this should have been otherwise” involves: a judgment passed over the entire course of things. Indeed, in the course of things, nothing is isolated: the

smallest detail supports the whole [*das Ganze*] [...] and criticizing any detail amounts to judging the whole. If one went even as far as affirming, as Kant held, that the moral norm is never fully satisfied and that it floats like some sort of beyond over reality [*Wirklichkeit*] without ever falling into it; in this case, morals [*die Moral*] would be passing judgment over the whole as such, and we could ask: *where do you take the right to do so?* How can the part [*Theil*] build itself into the judge of the whole? And if, as it has been said, this judgment and dissatisfaction with reality were in fact an irreducible instinct, wouldn't this instinct count as one of the irreducible stupidities and pretensions of our species?—But by saying this, we are doing what we are rejecting: the standpoint of desirability, this unauthorized way of playing judge, is part of the character [*Charakter*] of the course of things, and so does all injustice and all insufficiency. It is our notion of fulfilment that remains unfulfilled, nothing else. [...] What? The course of things would be this “away from here! Away from reality!” The eternal restlessness itself? The desirable would be the driving force itself?. (NF—7 [62], 1886)

So, Nietzsche all but endorses the constitutivist model in a way that converges with Katsafanas. He suggests, like Katsafanas and others (Doyle 2019; Richardson 1996) that the problem is ontological (it is something to do with the ‘whole as such’ and ‘the course of events’); that we must regard being itself as *desirans* and that it is only on this ontological basis that constitutivism can be used to resolve the problem of normativity. An important implication for our purposes is that the constitutivist model shows well how Nietzsche’s arguments do not outlaw the normative stance as such, but rather they point to the incompatibility between the normative stance and a certain ontological stance: any ontology that does not see being as *desirans* will be unable to justify normative judgments.

### **The Problem of a Normative Criterion**

Katsafanas’ constitutivist step is therefore sound both philosophically and textually. But it is only a step. The problem of normativity, for Nietzsche, contains two questions, only one of which is resolved by constitutivism. The first is about the legitimacy of judgment: can one legitimately take a normative stance (adopt the ‘point of view of desirability’) and under which conditions? Constitutivism responds that it is legitimate for beings, such as ourselves, which are constitutively judging, to judge (see in particular Katsafanas 2018b, 169, ff.). But there is the second question, namely: what distinguishes between good and bad judgments? After all, Nietzsche does more than judge and encourage us to judge. He makes claims, both explicit and implicit, about the correctness of these judgments. Appealing to some list of Nietzsche’s favourite values such as ‘truth,’ ‘life,’ ‘power,’ ‘endurance,’ ‘affirmation,’ ‘overcoming,’ etc. (Richardson 2021 provides an excellent review) will not help either. For values, as Nietzsche famously claims, are

themselves to be subjected to a criterion: we are to perform ‘the revaluation of values,’ (BGE 46, GM I, 8; GM III, 27, AC 13, AC 62 *passim*). In this sense, such values are only secondary and derived from a unified, yet, unknown, criterion (Richardson 2015). Such a criterion cannot be offered by constitutivism alone either (Queloz 2021). Constitutivism has shown that judgments cannot be incorrect because of their being judgments, but it has not shown why some judgments are made incorrect because of their contents. For example, Katsafanas shows that constitutivism can yield the negative and general principle that values are acceptable if they do not conflict with the will to power, but it cannot give more: for example, it cannot yield any unified or positive criterion for this value (Katsafanas 2011, 644–649). It is this question of the criterion for judgment that I address below.

### The Criterion of the Size of Future History

In this section, I argue that the appropriate judgment-guiding criterion is the size of future history: what is to be approved of is what leads to a larger future history, and what is to be censored is what stunts future history. I show that this criterion satisfies the requirements laid out above: it is consistent with the constitutivist model, it provides the right kind of qualified immanence, and it yields a rich sense of normativity.

In spite of its strangeness, there is some immediate appeal to the criterion of the size of future history. For one thing, it is consistent with constitutivism. The constitutivist model argues that willing is justified because being is will. In keeping with this premise, looking for a normative criterion implies that one must seek the *content* of this will in the nature of willing itself. For Nietzsche, moving from the will to what it wills is not difficult, since they coincide immediately: ‘one has eliminated the character of the will by subtracting from it its content, its *whither*’ (NF—14 [121], 1888. See also NF—9 [35], 1887 for the same idea). According to him, at its most general, the will as an ontological principle is always ‘the will to become *more*.’ (13:14 [121], 1888; see also 11:37[11], 1885) In a sense, the criterion of the size of future history is straightforward application of this principle: if the right to will is derived from the constitutive character of the will (the constitutivist thesis) and if this will is always ‘the will to become more,’ it follows that ‘becoming more’ constitutes the criterion that should guide our will. The only additional step I take here is that one should understand ‘becoming more’ as referring to a greater future chain of events. But this too, is easy to accept: for Nietzsche, to be is to be a certain quantum of will, the will does not exist outside of its expression, and the expression of the will is conquest or incorporation (*Einverleibung*), ie: ‘becoming more.’ In other words, to ‘become more’ means to increase one’s amount of will, and this means incorporating more. I conclude that the will is constitutively bent on

achieving more and bigger incorporative events, or in Katsafanas' language mentioned above, it is the will 'to encounter and overcome resistances': what the will wants is a larger future history.

Another appeal of the criterion of the size of future history is that it satisfies the requirement of qualified immanence as well. The requirement of qualified immanence states that any normative criterion will be external enough to what it judges (to avoid quietism), but close enough to it that it does not rely on any two-world theory. This means that normativity, if it is to be countenanced at all, relies on an ontology that has room for internal difference. In keeping with the constitutivist step, my proposal satisfies the requirement of qualified immanence by exploiting two characteristics of the hypothesis of the will to power: namely, that it involves defining being as becoming (Richardson 1996, 73–76), and that it takes a modal approach to ontology. This gives us reason to hope that it can offer us the kind of internal difference we are after.

Consider the ways in which ontologies of becoming accommodate agency (accommodating agency is a requirement established by constitutivism). Agency can influence events in a relevant way whilst the event is taking place, and not once it has taken place. The agency of a train machinist, for example, can make a difference to the train arriving at the station on time only while the train is on its way, but not once it has made it to the station: the trajectory of the train is open while it lasts. Saying that being is becoming involves saying that being is constitutively open in this way and therefore, that it constitutively has room for agency. This is what Nietzsche means in the desirability text (cited above) when he points out that the 'course of things' is characterised by an 'eternal restlessness.' In fact, in the context of an ontology of becoming, every moment of decision regains its normative weight (van Inwagen 1975), for being as becoming not only accommodates such agential decision-making, it requires it for its fulfilment. Becoming wills to go on becoming as much as possible (the constitutivist thesis), and our judgments and our agency are instrumental to the fulfilment of this wish. This, you will note, is enough to give us the normativity we need: some decisions lead to stunted becoming (for Nietzsche, decisions animated by a Christian ethics are among these for example), some to greater becoming (for example, decisions that result in high art), and some, possibly, are neutral. Yet, this steers equally clear of any two-world theory in just the requisite way because it means that what we value remains valued for reasons immanent to being, and not for the sake of some external, or transcendent, value.

Likewise, the ontology of becoming allows us to avoid quietism because in such an ontology, being can be satisfied *more or less*. It is true that for Nietzsche an undesirable event or fact, say 'sickness,' still fulfills the requirements of becoming: a sick individual or a sick

society can go on living and performing incorporative events. In this sense, they do take becoming further and thereby satisfy it. Yet, they remain comparatively undesirable because they fulfill becoming more minimally than alternate events (events whose occurrence they prevent, say: health) would. As I mentioned above, the theodicy problem is merely another formulation of the quietism problem, and indeed, it is resolved alongside it: an ontology of becoming resolves the problem of theodicy by allowing the 'bad' to be determined comparatively (in terms of 'more' or 'less'). In this model, the censorable is not 'real' in such a way as to be protected by the mereological argument (as a part of 'the whole'), but it is not unreal enough as to commit us to quietism: it is simply the difference between what is and what could (optimally), be. This difference has just the right kind of intermediary status: it exists but its substance is entirely dependent on the things that are different.

This may all seem too abstract and speculative, but you don't have to take my word for it. Recall that Nietzsche himself makes the very same case in the desirability text cited above: there, he argues that:

-Desiring is constitutive of being (so a reference to future possibilities must figure in the justification of any act or judgment),

-‘What is’ is not *ipso facto* legitimised (as the quietist view would have it), rather, it appeals to agency: given that being is the desire for more being, desiring is permissible because it can legitimately determine how much creation’ occurs.

-Therefore, to want a bigger world is consistent with the nature of the will (namely, its tendency to value what there is), to want a smaller world is less consistent with it (for it has less value, less being).

The second reason that supports the criterion of the size of future history is that it supports a rich sense of normativity: it is both evaluative (it gives us a standard for judging past events) and action-guiding (it gives us a standard for future action and practical deliberation). It is evaluative about the past because, on the basis of this action-guiding principle, we can judge past events and actions (in terms of which path they have sent us on). This also guides our judgment: a good person, a good nation, a good spirit, a good frame of mind, a good decision, a good religion, are those that lead to actions that tend to augment the size of future history. It is action-guiding too: we must always choose the action that will lead to a bigger future history: at every crossroad, at every moment of decision, we must take the road that stretches farther ahead. In short, this is a criterion that gives us all of the evaluative, the deontic and the prescriptive elements that one is entitled to expect from a properly normative criterion. I conclude that the criterion of the size of future history satisfies all three of the requirements listed above, it

conforms to Nietzsche's philosophy in spirit and in letter, and it is probably the best (perhaps the only) such candidate.

## Two Objections

I hope that the previous section has convinced you that my proposal is promising. Yet, one might still find it a strange criterion, not least because it was never formulated by Nietzsche himself (although admittedly, there is consensus in the literature that any criterion would have to be reconstructed on the basis of Nietzsche's texts anyhow). Below I formulate the two most pressing objections to my suggestion and propose responses to them. This will allow me to consolidate my case as well as to enter into further detail about what my proposal entails.

### *Judging Past Events*

The first objection one might raise is concerned with the status of past events. I have just argued that the criterion of the size of future history gives us a rich sense of normativity, which includes the ability to judge the past. Nietzsche judges past events too, and it nonetheless seems difficult at first glance to square this with a future-looking criterion of the sort I've presented. One might worry that although my proposal does provide a criterion for judging past events, it doesn't *justify* doing so. After all, if any facts belong to the past, judging them can only amount to engaging in resentment: a fruitless rejection of what there is and is no longer up for grabs. Indeed, Nietzsche's critique of morality is largely aimed at those who pass judgment over the inescapable and the necessary. Doing so is not only a fool's errand, it is also reprehensible because, by virtue of the mereological argument, it is self-contradictory, leads to self-hatred (we are censoring ourselves indirectly), 'sickness' and therefore, I might add, the stunting of growth, i.e.: a smaller future history. The question is whether my criterion when applied to past events, implies such resentful willing.

For this to be the case would require that we regard past events as necessary and inescapable, consummated and therefore impervious to the will of the latter-day judge. Yet, Nietzsche himself spends a lot of time trying to drive a wedge between the notion of pastness and the notion of inescapability, not least in the chapter on redemption of *Zarathustra*, where he explicitly promotes a will that transforms the past, a 'willing backwards.' For Nietzsche, just like for Faulkner, 'the past is not dead, it is not even past.' This is not because past events did not take place in the past, but rather because their normative valence survives them in such a way that the negative value of a past event can always be rearranged in the present to yield a positive value, and carrying out this reassignment of value is the responsibility of the

judging subject. According to Nietzsche, to redeem a fact is to build a future in which it turns out for the best. Anderson (2005, 200–203) famously uses the example of Jimmy Carter’s redeeming his disastrous reelection defeat at the hands of Ronald Reagan by investing his new status as former POTUS with renewed meaning through his peace-making activities. Far from undermining my proposal about the criterion of the size of future history, it seems that the concern for avoiding resentment supports it because it shows how Nietzsche’s talk of redemption is also animated by the concern for the size of future history: a past event that, if left alone, could tend towards a stunting of future history, may be redeemed thanks to a reappraisal. A judge who competently applies the criterion of the size of future history can, just like Carter, reopen a seemingly closed history. In fact, turning a past event into a milestone on the road to a larger future history is precisely what makes this a good thing.

### ***Size Vs. Length of Future History***

The second and more crucial objection that I see to the proposal of the size of future history has to do with my assumption that at every moment, future history can go down a plurality of paths, with a plurality of sizes. You will note that this is crucial to my ability to avoid the quietist trap, for if all possible futures are equal, then any event is ipso facto justified and this would return us to the quietist view. At its most critical, this is an objection that risks casting my proposal as nothing short of self-contradictory: after all, if being is becoming, then any talk of end of history is off the table: becoming goes on, by definition, forever. But without any end of history, can one talk meaningfully about the size of future history at all? Even more, can anyone compare the sizes of competing future paths, paths that are, by definition, infinite anyhow? Even more pressing, without an infinite future, what would we be meant to do with Nietzsche’s talk of eternal recurrence?

So, one must assume that all future histories are infinite and (for the sake of argument) therefore equal *in length*. This doesn’t mean, however, that they are equal in *size*. While length is a measure of objective time (say, in days, years or millennia); size is a measure of eventfulness. This is, roughly speaking, the distinction we appeal to in our everyday life when we say: ‘you’ve had a big day’ to someone who gave birth or passed an important exam. It is also on the basis of this distinction that there is any sense in claiming that the 4th of July 1776 was a bigger day than the 3rd of July 1776, although they both lasted 24 hours (or had the same length). Richardson (2006, 216) argues that for Nietzsche, the experience of time in terms of eventfulness is more fundamental than the experience in terms of length: ‘Life gets its original time from this logic of drives or wills.’ This means that ‘life’ is experienced as a series of will-episodes. Since we know that the basic *modus operandi* of the

will is incorporation, these will-episodes, in turn, should be understood as incorporative events. As it happens, this discussion of the qualitative notion of time (something whose size is measured in terms of eventfulness) as opposed to a quantified account (where time has merely a length measured in days, years, etc.)

There is plenty of evidence that Nietzsche endorsed such a distinction. For example, it is this distinction that underpins Zarathustra's discussion of the 'great events, which suggests that some events are bigger than others (independently of their 'length'). It is also at work in Nietzsche's foundational opposition between survival (a quantitative principle measured in length) and life (a qualitative principle measured in size), for example, when Nietzsche insists that the will to power's aiming for 'growth' (in *size*) distinguishes it from Spinoza's 'conatus' which is, as he contends, merely concerned with infinite subsistence in *length* (GS, 349, KSA 9:11[193], pp. - 517–18 BGE 13, See also Urs-Sommer 2012, 173). All of these uses of the distinction between length and size amount to this: that equal quantities of energy can have wildly divergent qualitative values, just like infinite future histories of equal *length* might possess wildly divergent *sizes*.

In the Nachlass of 1886–1887 Nietzsche also endorses this distinction when he opposes measuring events from the 'mechanistic' point of view (concerned with length) and from the 'economical' point of view (concerned with size). He argues that although the amount of energy in the world or an individual organism may remain the same mechanistically, some configurations of this energy constitute a 'real increase' ['wirkliche Vermehrung'] economically, while others constitute a neutralisation (in other places, he talks of this mutual cancelling of forces as 'sickness' (Letteri 1990; Müller-Lauter 1999):

Regarded mechanistically, the energy of the totality of becoming [*Gesammt-werdens*] remains constant; regarded economically, it rises to a high point [*Höhepunkt*] [...] The same *quantum* of energy signifies different things at different stages in the development. (NF—10 [138], 1887)

Formidable powers [*Gewalten*] are unleashed, but they are contradictory [*widersprechend*]. The unleashed forces [*Kräfte*] annihilate [*vernichtend*] each other. [We must] bind the unleashed forces anew so that they don't annihilate each other, and open our eyes to the real *increase* [*die wirkliche Vermehrung*] of forces!. (NF—2 [100], 1886)

But there is no need to turn to the *Nachlass* or to wait for 1886 for such subtleties. For the crucial distinction between length and size is already at work in Nietzsche's famous critique of the Last Human in *Zarathustra* of 1885 (Nietzsche, 2005). The Last Human is a form of life that won't die (and therefore has an infinite future history ahead of it), 'its race is as inexterminable as the ground-flea.' Yet, it is unable to introduce any growth in size to

history, they ‘will give birth to no more stars’ (Z, Prologue, 5, see also BGE 262) making them ‘the greatest danger for all human future’ (Z, III, Old and New Tables’ 27, see also GM, I, 12). The future history of the last human, Nietzsche argues, is both infinite in the ‘mechanistic’ sense (in length) and small in the ‘economical’ one (in size). I conclude that Nietzsche refers to the ability to produce incorporative events as ‘real increase’. And that therefore the ‘real’ measure of events (and by extension, of history) is not to be taken in mechanistic terms, but in economic ones. I conclude that he endorsed the distinction between length and size of future history, and that I am therefore entitled to avail myself of it too. How we are meant to measure such events this in each case is a separate, and thorny, if not desperate, issue, which I must leave to one side.

### Further Applications in Nietzsche’s Text

So far, I have been mostly concerned with presenting the criterion of the size of future history and with showing how it satisfies the requirements set out by Nietzsche himself in his critique of morals as well as in his judging practice. As I mentioned in the introduction, this is not the same as arguing that Nietzsche himself endorsed such a criterion consciously or explicitly. My suggestion is largely agnostic about this: I merely argue that in Nietzsche’s writings, *everything takes place as if* the criterion of the size of future history was at work. Most importantly, this means that regardless of Nietzsche’s opinion, this model helps us maintain that there is no necessary contradiction when we see Nietzsche or anyone else combine a critique of morality with judgment. In the above, we saw that the criterion of the size of future history is quite a close fit with key themes of Nietzsche’s work, such as the critique of the Last Human, Nietzsche’s discussion of redemption, his critique of resentment, and his discussion of sickness and health. I have also mentioned briefly that the criterion of the size of future history allows us to contextualize the values that Nietzsche explicitly promotes, and it would be easy, although beyond the purview of this paper, to show that they all involve increasing an individual or a group’s ability to produce greater events and therefore a larger future history. There are many further areas of Nietzsche’s thought that can benefit from the perspective of the size of future history, including his talk of ‘greatness,’ of ‘creation,’ of ‘overcoming’ and his theory of history. All of this would be worth examining in detail, not least because using the criterion of the size of future history to analyse them promises to establish continuities between Nietzsche’s early, middle and late works, and between strands in his thought that may otherwise appear disconnected. Let me now apply the criterion of the size of future history to three areas of Nietzsche’s work, namely, Nietzsche’s discussions of futurity, of cultivation and of self-becoming. I will

argue that Nietzsche's treatment of these themes makes sense within the general project of the increase of future history. Of course, all of this can only be done very preliminarily.

## **Futurity**

There is an obvious sense in which the criterion of the size of future history is consistent with Nietzsche's sustained emphasis on futurity (Z, II, Rabble; GS, P. 2; GM II, 24 etc.). But the connection runs even deeper, for as I mentioned above, Nietzsche cannot simply be suggesting that the future must be preserved if he means this in any quantitative (or 'mechanistic' sense). In a quantitative sense, the future is guaranteed. Nietzsche's insistence on futurity is, rather, a normative one: we must construct a future worthy of the name, a future that is transformative and not just a continuation of the status quo, that is to say, a future that is eventful. As is well known, Nietzsche's rhetoric of futurity centers around two rhetorical tropes: first, we should not 'live the present at the expense of the future' (GM, Preface, 6); second, the duty of philosophy is to produce 'philosophers of the future' and 'men of the future'. This second point is so broad that in different instances, Nietzsche uses the genitive case in all of three senses: philosophers 'of' the future are alternately: philosophers who envision the future and think long-term (for example, those meta-ethicists who apply the criterion of the size of future history); philosophers who produce a future (the critics of morality, whose efforts are devoted to preventing morality from sending us down the path of the last human); they too, apply the criterion of the size of future history; and finally philosophers that will appear in the future but are not even yet conceivable and whose arrival can only be prepared (it is in this context that Nietzsche also talks of 'men of the future' and of the *Übermensch*). The preparation, of course, is dependent on whether the ethics that applies the criterion of the size of future history triumphs over its nemesis: 'the morality of custom' which makes us 'living the past at the expense of the future,' and its surrounding expressions such as the '*petit fatalisme*' (GM, III, 24) which draws from authentic fatalism the narrow conclusion that fate is reducible to the factual realm. In this sense, the three senses of the phrase 'philosophers of the future' as well as the imperative not to live the present at the expense of the future are unified. This should give us a preliminary idea of how tightly the question of value is connected to the future and how the idea of the criterion of the size of future history is a necessary presupposition of Nietzsche's concern for futurity.

## Culture

There is one other large expanse of Nietzsche's normative thought that can demonstrably be illuminated by the criterion of the size of future history: Nietzsche's philosophy of culture. Since his very earliest texts, Nietzsche considered it his mission to contribute to the establishment of an optimal relationship between nature and culture. The function of culture is to achieve a 'transfiguration of nature' which leads into the 'promotion of superior beings.' (UM III, 7). That is to say, in a language we have seen above, it was a matter of making sure that culture fulfilled its 'cultivating function' by ensuring that the raw greatness of nature did not go to waste. Left to its own devices, nature, Nietzsche argues, is a 'poor economist,' it 'propels the philosopher into mankind like an arrow, it takes no aim but hopes it will stick somewhere.' (UM III, 7) It provides raw material of differing qualities but does nothing to ensure that the best individuals thrive. The task of ensuring this is left to culture. Not only does this mean that nature runs the risk of wasting those whom Nietzsche calls the 'lucky strokes' [*Glücksfälle*] by leaving their potential unfulfilled, it also means that nature doesn't select out those whose existence constitutes a threat to them (UM, III; BGE 126 *passim*; see also Clark and Wonderly 2015). The function of culture is therefore to compensate for this blindness of nature: to set up structures that increase the chances of success for those born great and increases the chances of destruction of those who are like dead weight to the rest. In *Zarathustra*, famously, the thought of Eternal Recurrence is one such cultivating device, a breeding thought that 'gives many the right to erase themselves' (NF-13:14[94]). This function that Nietzsche attributes to culture, whether it is individualistic like it tends to be in the texts from the 1870s, or collective like it increasingly becomes later, is always aimed at aligning forces in such a way that they are directed outwards, that is to say, in a way that promotes the production of large events and a larger future history. Cristy has recently argued that the opposition between individualism whereby culture is an instrument for the production of great individuals or communitarianism aimed at producing great civilisations (she attributes the view to Young), must be overcome (Cristy 2023, fn. 29, p. 21). My proposal about the size of future history offers a ground on which to do so: history is made both by collectivities and by individuals, and according to this criterion, communities and individuals alike gain their value in terms of their ability to promote a larger future history (for history is neither collective nor individual, or it is both).

### ***Self-Becoming and Amor Fati***

This discussion of cultivation, according to Nietzsche, feeds immediately into the theme of self-becoming: after all, what culture is meant to achieve is the self-becoming of the great individuals, groups and nations (Chouraqui 2021). You will recall that the problem of normativity the way I have presented it at the outset of this essay had famously been approached in terms of the imperative of self-creation. In a famous article, Leiter (2006, 281) argues that there is a tension between Nietzsche's fatalism and the imperative of self-creation. Yet, the problem is not about self-creation specifically, for there would be such tension between fatalism and any imperative at all (which leads Leiter into a questionable quietist reading of Nietzsche, 2006, 281). I am now inclined to think the problem flagged by Leiter is fundamentally resolved: on the one hand, we do justice to fatalism by accepting that being and only being is the standard of value and on the other hand, we do justice to any talk of creation or agency (alongside judgment talk) by accepting that agency is meant to allow becoming not only to become (even nihilism, resentment and ascetic morality do this), but to become *as much as possible*.

This has some retroactive effects on the notion of self-creation: the first is that we should think of the imperative of self-creation too as governed by the criterion of the size of future history: we must create ourselves because this is a necessary step towards producing a larger future. This is best understood via Nietzsche's talk of health and sickness: after all, for Nietzsche sickness indicates internal division, and health indicates internal cohesion. What this means, in terms of the opposition of mechanism and economics outlined above, is that sickness engages the same amount of energy as health (they are 'mechanistically' equal), although this energy is entirely exhausted against itself, with nothing to show for it. In the case of health however, our energies are mutually reinforcing, and they can only express themselves by producing incorporative events (or as Katsafanas says, 'overcoming obstacles'), thereby securing a larger future history. Whether we take the expression 'self-creation' in its more radical sense or as a synonym to 'self-becoming' the result is an ethics of optimization of forces fully consonant with the cultural project of optimization at the collective and individual levels. In both cases, this optimization is valuable because it conforms to the project of building a larger future history.

### **Conclusion**

Taking the size of future history to be the evaluative and prescriptive criterion that underpins the entirety of Nietzsche's normative pronouncements is consistent with the elliptical passages where Nietzsche tackles the normativity problem and with the constitutivist line opened by Katsafanas. It

is also compatible with Nietzsche's idea that morality should neither quietly ratify being nor stand against it. More importantly, it makes philosophical sense. For Nietzsche's problem of normativity, and the correlated intuition whereby judgment should remain possible, are widely shared. The criterion of the size of future history gives this intuition a consistent articulation.

As a final thought, let me return to a point I have made in passing: that Nietzsche's problem carries an interest that goes beyond the Nietzschean context, and even beyond philosophy. It seems to me this is at work in many of our everyday normative stances. Many of our political views refer – explicitly or not – to the best ways to achieve a richer future. This involves policies that promote culture, education, the arts and innovation for example, rather than policies of preservation, aimed at sustaining current life forms and the narrowing of human possibilities. There are similar questions at stake in the way we raise our children: to have rich and eventful lives, or safe ones; or the way we treat each other: through exclusion (depriving ourselves of the chance of a richer world made of more kinds of people, models, and stimulants) or through toleration, which embraces the others not out of duty or respect for their transcendent essence, but rather, out of the wish to live in a wider, richer world. This broadly progressive ethos, if it is to avoid any appeal to transcendence, will have to support itself with a sophisticated meta-ethics of the kind we outlined above.

## Note

1. By theodicy, I simply mean a concern about the ontological status of evil. Hatab (2013) and Janaway (2017) correctly point out that more traditional formulation of theodicy as questioning the justification for suffering doesn't apply in the context of Nietzsche's work.

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