



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE DISARTICULATION OF THE SELF IN NIETZSCHE

Author(s): J. Hillis Miller

Source: *The Monist*, APRIL, 1981, Vol. 64, No. 2, Nineteenth-Century Thought Today (APRIL, 1981), pp. 247-261

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27902694>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Monist*

JSTOR

THE DISARTICULATION OF THE SELF IN NIETZSCHE

The function of Nietzsche in our present intellectual life is a salient example of the continued vitality of the nineteenth-century in the thought of today. In Germany, in France, in Italy, and in the United States new work of editing and commentary has made Nietzsche a current force. The monumental Colli-Montinari edition, which includes many of Nietzsche's hitherto unpublished notebooks and drafts, is the most conspicuous evidence of this on the textual side. This edition will make available in German, French, Italian, and Japanese versions a far more complete and accurate Nietzsche than we have had. Mention should also be made of the new English translations by Walter Kaufmann. These have made good versions of most of Nietzsche's books available to those with no German, though the Kaufmann translations are far less complete than the Colli-Montinari edition. On the side of commentary, the bibliography of new work on Nietzsche is enormous. Two collective volumes may be mentioned. They indicate at least a sketch map of this rugged terrain: *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, edited and introduced by David D. Allison, and *Nietzsche Aujourd'hui?*¹ The new work appropriates Nietzsche for present purposes. Ideas which may seem especially characteristic of the literature and philosophy of our own day are found to have been already worked out by Nietzsche in his own way. These would include linguistic, artistic, historical, social, and psychological concepts. Among these is Nietzsche's systematic putting in question of the idea that the self is a substantial and integral entity.

Demystification of the idea of fixed, substantial selfhood has been one of the subjects of nineteenth and twentieth-century thought generally. This is true in spite of the dependence of such movements as phenomenology and existentialism on the idea of the ego, "transcendental" or otherwise. After Nietzsche and Freud, however, it would seem difficult to take the existence of the self as an a priori firmly established. Even earlier, Cervantes, Sterne, and Diderot among novelists, for example, had already in one way or another put the existence of the self in question. Moreover, neither Husserl nor Heidegger, as a matter of fact, hold to an idea of the self in the sense of an original and originating ego. Husserlian intentionality is by no means the same as intention in the sense of "I intend to do so and so." Nor is it a matter here of social or historical forces which endanger or alienate the self assumed to be there already, according to an outmoded reading of "modernism." In ques-

tion is rather an insight, present in one way or another at all times in our history, into the fact that the self may never have been there in the first place except as a social or linguistic fiction.

Of all modern deconstructors of the idea of selfhood perhaps Nietzsche, in Book Three of *The Will to Power* (in the traditional ordering of the *Nachlass*), presents the most systematic and cogent dismantling of the concept in its relation to the other metaphysical concepts with which it is necessarily connected. Decomposition of the idea of selfhood is of course one of Nietzsche's main themes, from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and the incomplete *Philosophenbuch* (1873) on. The topic runs like a red thread through all Nietzsche wrote. Book Three of *The Will to Power* contains, among other things, a concentrated effort of deconstruction directed against the concept of the self. This powerful polemic recurs throughout Book Three as a patient and constantly renewed process of disarticulation, for which there is no "central" expression. Section 477, in the traditional numbering, contains most of the elements involved. This section brings out the way the image of the line is involved both in the fiction of the self and in its undoing. The passage looks simple enough, but Nietzsche's thought here, in its connection with other sections of Book Three, is exceedingly complex. It is difficult to rethink it, or to hold it clearly in one's mind as a logical argument:

I maintain (*Ich halte*) the phenomenality of the *inner* world, too: everything of which we *become conscious* is arranged, simplified (*vereinfacht*), schematized, interpreted through and through—the *actual* process of inner "perception," the *causal connection* (*die Kausalvereinigung*) between thoughts, feelings, desires, between subject and object, are absolutely hidden from us—and are perhaps purely imaginary. The "apparent *inner* world" is governed by just the same forms and procedures as the "outer" world. We never encounter "facts": pleasure and displeasure (*Lust und Unlust*) are subsequent and derivative intellectual phenomena—

(*Die "Ursächlichkeit"*) eludes us; to suppose a direct causal link (*ein unmittelbares ursächliches Band*), as logic does—that is the consequence of the crudest and clumsiest observation. *Between* two thoughts *all kinds of affects* play their game (*Zwischen zwei Gedanken spielen noch alle möglichen Affekte ihr Spiel*): but their motions are too fast, therefore we *fail to recognize* them, we *deny* them (*deshalb verkennen wir sie, leugnen wir sie*)—

"Thinking," as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction (*eine ganz willkürliche Fiktion*), arrived at by selecting *one* element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement (*eine künstliche Zurechtmachung*) for the purpose of intelligibility—

The "Spirit," something that thinks: where possible even "absolute, pure spirit"—this conception is a second derivative of that false introspection which believes in "thinking": first an act is imagined which simply does not occur, "thinking," and a subject-substratum in which every act of thinking, and nothing other than thinking (*und sonst nichts anderes*), has its origin (*seinen Ursprung*):

that is to say, *both the deed and the doer are fictions (sowohl das Tun, als der Täter sind fingiert)*.²

The image of the line is fundamental both in Nietzsche's concept of the self and in its disarticulation. The parts of this concept are bound into one around the central "substratum" of the subject. Nietzsche unties these bonds, performs a *dénouement* of the knotted elements. In so doing he demolishes that central substratum too. When the links chaining the parts together vanish the phantom of their origin (*Ursprung*) in a single substantial thing called selfhood also vanishes, like a ghost at daybreak.

This disarticulation is also performed by reversing the apparent order of origination and derivation. The usual sequence—putting subject first, and its thoughts second as derived from the thinker, putting the thoughts themselves in sequence, each causing the next, in logical order, asserting a causal connection between the outer world and sensations or thoughts caused by the outer world—all three are condemned as metalepses, reversals of the actual order of temporal priority, a putting of the earlier later and the later earlier and so creating a false appearance of a necessary sequence.

Essential to this procedure of disarticulation is the idea that the fundamental activity of the mind is an activity of interpretation. All interpretation is false interpretation. It is an aberrant reading dependent on simplifying, schematizing, omitting, a making equal of things which are not equal. To put this another way, all interpretation is the making of figures of speech and then the committing of the aboriginal human error of taking these figurative equivalences as literally true of extra-linguistic reality.

Nietzsche's disentangling of the various crossroads or knots involved in the idea of selfhood follows no established order of priority, since order and priority are among the things being undone. Rather, each particular effort of untying, in the different sections of Book Three, depends on assuming that some other one has already been accomplished and can be used as the model for the present one. The result is a constant process of undoing without any fixed starting place. Since the knot of presuppositions being untied was constructed by the same circular process of a round robin positing—the notion of self depending on theological assumptions, but those theological assumptions depending on the notion of self, and both depending on the idea of causality, the idea of substance, the idea of ground, but those ideas making no sense without the theological assumptions, and so on, in a perpetual round—it is appropriate that the untying should mime in reverse the same procedure, suspending it by performing its magic performatives backwards.

The purpose of the falsification creating the idea of the self is to make continued human life possible and for the pleasure of an exercise of the artistic will to power over things. This gives us the illusion of knowing them,

whereas in fact, as Vico long ago said, we can know only what we have made. “Truth,” says Nietzsche in section 493 of *The Will to Power*, “is the kind of error (*Irrtum*) without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive” (Eng., p. 272; Ger., p. 884), and in section 495: “the sense for the real is the means for acquiring the power to shape things according to our wish. The joy in shaping and reshaping—a primeval joy. We can comprehend only a world that we ourselves have made (*Die Lust am Gestalten und Umgestalten—eine Urlust! Wir Können nur eine Welt begreifen, die wir selber gemacht haben*).” (Eng., p. 272; Ger., p. 424).

This deconstruction of the external world is in section 477 taken for granted. It is posited as the solid base on which a secondary positing may be deposited: “I maintain the phenomenality of the *inner* world, too.” As Nietzsche says in section 482: “We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word ‘I,’ the word ‘do,’ the word ‘suffer,’ these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not ‘truths’ ” (Eng., p. 267; Ger., p. 863). The inner world, the world of subjectivity, the ego, the self, has the same structure and nature as the external world man has constructed for himself in the primeval joy of his artistic shaping. The inner world too, the world of “thoughts, feelings, desires (*Gedanken, Gefühlen, Begehungen*),” is phenomenal. It is an appearance, a fiction, a work of art: “The ‘apparent *inner* world’ is governed by just the same forms and procedures as the ‘outer’ world.” It too is the result of schematizing, omitting, simplifying, a figurative making equal of the unequal. In short, it is the result of an act of interpretation. It is a misreading.

Nietzsche’s procedure of deconstruction for the inner world of subjectivity is the same as that for the apparent outer world of things. Five different procedures of dismantling are simultaneously employed in section 477 and in other related passages.

First, the individual entities of which the soul is supposed to be constituted—thoughts, feelings, faculties, and so on—are held by Nietzsche not to exist as such but only to be the fictitious products of acts of simplifying construction: “We never encounter ‘facts’: pleasure and displeasure are subsequent and derivative intellectual phenomena—” The same thing may be said for all the other “facts” of the inner world.

Moreover, no two feelings or thoughts are the same, or continue, or ever recur. They are made to appear to do so by the same act of making simple, regular, and manageable which motivates our creation of a fictitious outer world: “In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant (*Gleichbleibendes*) for it to base a scheme of behavior on it” (Eng., p. 266; Ger., p. 751); “In *our* thought, the essential feature is fitting

new material into old schemes (= Procrustes' bed), *making* equal what is new (*das Gleich-machen des Neuen*)" (Eng., p. 273; Ger., p. 462). This "making equal" of what is unequal is both the primordial act of naming, making up the name "leaf" for what does not exist, since no two leaves are the same, nor does any one remain the same from moment to moment, and at the same time it is the primordial act of making figures of speech, since making equal what is unequal is the basis of figuration. Naming and figuration are the "same," which is to say that the beginning is catachresis. A second act of deconstruction Nietzsche performs, then, is to undo this construction of regularity and continuity by denying that any two phenomena of the inner world are ever the same. No feeling or thought may ever continue or ever recur, holds Nietzsche (*Ich halte*), as he says.

A third disarticulation is to undo the supposed links which appear to bind together in tight chains the sequences of these fictitious entities as they follow one another in the mind. Much of Nietzsche's attention in section 477 and the other "similar" sections is focused on the undoing of the concept of causality. Here the image of tying and untying is fundamental. The apparently firm causal links between one thought or feeling and the next are said to be hidden or perhaps non-existent: "to suppose a direct causal link between thoughts, as logic does—that is the consequence of the crudest and clumsiest observation." Events in the inner world of consciousness simply follow one another without any connection, causal or otherwise, between them. Each is self-enclosed. It is separated by a gap from all other thoughts and feelings and only made into any sort of pattern with them by an arbitrary act of artistic construction: "Everything of which we become conscious," says Nietzsche in section 478, "is a terminal phenomenon (*Enderschienung*), an end—and causes (*verursacht*) nothing; every successive phenomenon in consciousness is completely atomistic" (Eng., p. 265; Ger., p. 729).

A fourth process of decomposition is related to the third. It is not so much an untying as a reversal. It is one of the most powerful arguments Nietzsche makes against the coherence of the inner world and against the possibility of unifying it around the idea of the self. If the apparent entities of the inner world do not exist as such, if nothing in the inner world continues or recurs or is the same as any other, and if the apparent lines between these fictitious entities are themselves fictitious, these apparent lines themselves are not only fictitious. They are also drawn backwards. The apparent causal links of the inner world are the result of that preposterous figure of speech which puts the early late and the late early: *metalepsis*.

There are two forms of this in the inner world. One is the mistaken ascription of causal power over the events in that inner world to events or forces in the outer world. This apparent sequence from outer to inner, from

object to subject, is a reversal of the true order. Inner precedes outer and projects that outer as the illusory cause of its states. This means that the distinction between inner and outer breaks down. It too is an illusion, a fiction, a work of art. There is no solid object to cause subject but only one single “phenomenal” realm within which all these fictitious entities and the lines between them are constructed. Nietzsche’s procedure of deconstruction here is to reverse what has been reversed. He performs a metalepsis of the metalepsis, a chiasmus of the chiasmus. He reveals thereby the fictitious, projective nature of the supposed “cause” in the “outer” world. This is implicit in section 477, but it is most explicitly performed in another well-known section, 479:

The phenomenalism of the “inner world.” Chronological inversion (*Umdrehung*), so that the cause (*die Ursache*) enters consciousness later than the effect. —We have learned that pain is projected to a part of the body without being situated there—we have learned that sense impressions naively supposed to be conditioned by the outer world are, on the contrary, conditioned by the inner world; that we are always unconscious of the real activity of the outer world—The fragment of outer world of which we are conscious is born after (*nachgeboren*) an effect from outside has impressed itself upon us, and is subsequently (*nachträglich*) projected as its ‘cause’— (Eng., p. 265; Ger., p. 804)

If the outer world is no prior cause, but rather a later projected illusion cast back as the supposed source of some “inner” event, feeling, or thought, the same inversion is spontaneously practiced by consciousness to make sense of the temporal order of the inner world taken in itself. “We believe that thoughts as they succeed one another in our minds stand in some kind of causal relation (*kausalen Verkettung*)” (Eng., p. 264; Ger., p. 728), but in fact “the sequence of thoughts and feelings is only their becoming visible in consciousness. That this sequence has anything to do with a causal chain (*einer Kausal-Verkettung*) is completely unbelievable: consciousness has never furnished us with an example of cause and effect” (Eng., p. 284; Ger., p. 732).

Nietzsche unties the links of cause and effect in the inner world first by seeing them as a gross oversimplification of an enormously complex set of occurrences rapidly happening. As he says in section 477: “Between two thoughts all kinds of affects play their game: but their motions are too fast, therefore we fail to recognize them, we deny them.” Second, Nietzsche argues that these oversimplified links go in the wrong direction. He reverses the metalepses once more and defines the inner causes too as fictitious entities projected backward after the effects to account for them. Projection is a switch of prior and posterior in which the effect is made the cause of its cause, the cause the effect of its effect:

In the phenomenism of the "inner world" we invert the chronological order of cause and effect. The fundamental fact of "inner experience" is that the cause is imagined after the effect has taken place—The same applies to the succession of thoughts: we seek the reason (*Grund*) for a thought before we are conscious of it; and the reason enters consciousness first, and then its consequence—Our entire dream life is the interpretation (*die Auslegung*) of complex feelings with a view to possible causes—and in such a way that we are conscious of a condition only when the supposed causal chain (*Kausalitäts-Kette*) associated with it has entered consciousness. (Eng., p. 265; Ger., p. 804)

Nietzsche's thought here is not easy to grasp. The paradox is that we are not, and cannot be, conscious of the "facts" of the inner world as such, not even of effects, such as pain, or a thought, which seem to exist only as facts of consciousness. We cannot be conscious of our consciousness as such. The reason is that consciousness only works in terms of comprehensible imaginary causal chains. We project backward a fictitious cause and only then can the fact of consciousness, the thought or the feeling, enter consciousness. It enters consciousness in the thoroughly aberrant form of a fictitious effect of a fictitious cause: "The effect always 'unconscious': the inferred and imagined cause (*Ursache*) is projected (*projiziert*), follows in time" (Eng., p. 271; Ger., p. 473). An effect of which we are not yet conscious becomes the cause of an imaginary cause, and that imaginary cause then generates belatedly the consciousness of an effect which fits that imaginary cause in the sense of being purely imaginary, "phenomenal," too. If dreams are invention of phantasmal causes for conditions which we can only become aware of in the dream, in the form of equally phantasmal effects, as when a book falling to the floor is read by the dream as a shot fired by a burglar breaking in to the house, our entire "waking" life is also no more than a sequence of regularized and recurrent dreams. The human condition is to be, in the striking phrase from the early essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," "as if (*Gleichsam*) hanging in dreams on the back of a tiger."³

The function of language in the human economy is to make the regularizing and equalizing of our collective dreamlife possible. The names which are already there for anyone born into the human dream are the tools with which the metalepses making our waking dreams are constructed. Language, which is originally the performative violence of catachresis, is a false figure for what cannot be named literally. It then becomes the construction by elaborate transfers of metaphor and metonymy of a whole beehive or columbarium of concepts and classifications. This process is the indispensable means of making that mad waking dream which man calls his familiar sane conscious life:

The whole of "inner experience" rests upon the fact that a cause of an excitement of the nerve centers is sought and imagined—and that only a cause thus discovered enters consciousness: this cause in no way corresponds to (*ist schlechterdings nicht adequat*) the real cause—it is a groping (*ein Tasten*) on the basis of previous "inner experiences," i.e., of memory (*Gedächtnisses*). But memory also maintains the habit of all interpretations, i.e., of erroneous causality (*irrtümlichen Ursächlichkeit*)—so that the "inner experience" has to contain within it the consequences of all previous false causal fictions. . . .

"Inner experience" enters our consciousness only after it has found a language (*eine Sprache*) the individual understands—i.e., a translation (*Übersetzung*) of a condition into conditions familiar to him—; "to understand" means merely: to be able to express something new in the language of something old and familiar. (Eng., pp. 265–66; Ger., pp. 804–05)

It is only after this elaborate act of untying, moving backwards to undo knot after knot which has woven the web of the inner world, that Nietzsche comes at last, at the end of section 477, to the ur-fiction on the ground of which the whole airy structure has been built: the notion of the unity, substantiality, and perdurability of the self. Having patiently dismantled, one by one, the entities of the inner world, feelings and thoughts, and loosing the apparently determining causal lines between those entities, Nietzsche turns finally to the supposed subject, the *Ich* or "I" which does the thinking and feeling. It is easy to see that the concept of the self does not have a leg to stand on. It vanishes like all the other imaginary entities and imaginary lines between entities of the "inner world."

Nietzsche's thinking here is again complex. It involves several elements simultaneously. It will be necessary to cite a number of texts in order to give the whole network of connections involved in the unpositing of the self. Each text repeats the denial but follows a slightly different track out from this point in the web, tracing a different consequence of self-positing or of its denial. Section 477 ends with the fictionalizing of the subject, and a cascade of other passages in surrounding sections in the traditional ordering repeats the annihilating dismissal of the substance of the self:

—This conception is a second derivative of that false interpretation which believes in "thinking": first an act is imagined which simply does not occur, "thinking," and secondly a subject-substratum in which every act of thinking, and nothing but thinking, has its origin: that is to say, both the deed and the doer are fictions. (Eng., p. 264; Ger., p. 674)

There exists neither "spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions (*Fiktionen*) that are of no use. (Eng., p. 266; Ger., p. 751)

"The subject": interpreted from within ourselves, so that the ego (*das Ich*) counts as a substance, as the cause of all deeds, as a doer (*Täter*). The logical-metaphysical postulates, the belief in substance, accident, attribute, etc., derive

their convincing force from our habit of regarding all our deeds (*Tun*) as consequences of our will—so that the ego, as substance, does not vanish in the multiplicity of change. —*But there is no such thing as will. (Aber es gibt keinen Willen.)*— (Eng., pp. 269–70; Ger., pp. 536–37)

No such thing as the will! How can the philosopher of will, *par excellence*, in a book now called *The Will to Power*, deny the existence of the will? Will there is, for Nietzsche, but not will in the sense of an intention directed by a conscious, unified, substantial self. Will is rather a name for force, for the forces, inner and outer (but the distinction no longer makes sense), which make things happen as they happen. Will as force (the will to power) is the product of difference, of the differentiation of energies, as an electric current flows only if there is a difference of potential between two poles, though the “poles” exist not as things in themselves but as their difference from one another, as in the case of two letters, phonemes, or other signs in structural linguistics. The other will, will in the ordinary sense of, “I will to do this,” is one element in a complex tangle of elements which are untied and disintegrated by Nietzsche at the instant the self is annihilated.

Once again, in the series of passages in which this occurs, there is not so much a chiasmus or the righting reversal of an aberrant metalepsis, as a constant reversal of cause and effect, origin and result, like that Hermetic egg, mentioned by W. B. Yeats, which turns inside out without breaking its shell, or like a Gestaltist diagram in which figure and ground constantly change places before the beholder’s eyes. Whichever element one looks at is the figure grounded on the other as pre-existing substance. In this case, the notion of the self is a final result of a complex series of fabrications leading to the fiction of thinking and then to that of a thinker. First we imagine an act which does not exist, thinking, and then ultimately we posit a fictitious entity, the self, to do the thinking. To deconstruct the notion of the “I” that thinks one must, as Nietzsche does in section 477, patiently untie all the liaisons constituting the act of thinking and then, finally, the doer will dissolve in the dissolution of his deed. On the other hand, in others of the fragments on the self, the self is seen as the originating fictitious postulate on the basis of which causality, will, substance, and so on, are projected. Origin and end constantly change places, so that whatever one looks at appears secondary in relation to some prior act of positing which must be assumed already to have taken place. The act of origination is never in itself present as such, but always took place already, over there, earlier. The whole structure of elements sustains itself in a constantly moving airy confabulation of autogenerating and autosustaining fictions, like a man lifting himself by his own bootstraps—and turning somersaults to boot. This means that the putting in question of any one element disperses the whole fabrication, like an architectual edifice of

clouds, leaving not a wrack behind. The interdependence and lack of an originating hypothesis on which all the rest depend, explains also the contradictions in Nietzsche's formulations, the way what is cause in one fragment becomes effect in another, and vice versa.

The figure of interpretation is essential to Nietzsche's enterprise of deconstruction. The structure of "experience" is redefined as a text which has been interpreted, or as an act of interpretation: "Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—'There are only *facts (Tatsachen)*'— I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations" (Eng., p. 267; Ger., p. 903). The figure of text and interpretation is, however, a figure, that is a displacement, a distortion, in short itself an interpretation. The text in question, that is, the various entities of the inner world making up a given person's "character"—feelings, thoughts, volitions, the "self"—is not a present document waiting to be read. It is created by the act of interpretation which reads it. Interpretation posits the signs and reads them, in a single act, once more of autogeneration, autosuspension, and, ultimately, of autodestruction, since any act of interpretation always contains the materials of its own undoing. The phenomena of the inner world of character are not facts to be named. They are themselves entities which only exist as hypotheses, that is, as performative suppositions, signs which are interpretative fictions. Intrinsic to this act of positing is the positing of an interpreter behind the interpretation, namely the self: "'Everything is subjective,' you say; but even this is interpretation (*Auslegung*). The 'subject' is not something given, it is something added and projected behind (*Dahinter-Gestecktes*) what there is. —Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention (*Dichtung*), hypothesis" (Eng., p. 267; Ger., p. 903).

This positing of the arch-interpreter, the self, in turn, in a circularity or circulation which is of the essence here, becomes the basis of the system of language within which our thinking remains imprisoned. This imprisonment is for man's own good, since the original motivating force behind the whole construction was the simplifying, making calculable and regular, necessary to life: "However habitual and indispensable this fiction [that the ego 'causes' thoughts] may have become by now—*that* in itself proves nothing against its imaginary origin (*Erdichtetheit*): a belief can be a condition of life and *nonetheless* be false" (Eng., p. 268; Ger., p. 915); "*Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. (Wahrheit ist die Art von Irrtum, ohne welche eine bestimmte Art von lebendigen Wesen nicht leben könnte.) The value for life is ultimately decisive*" (Eng., p. 272; Ger., p. 844).

The essential aspect of language, in turn, is the rigorous chain of grammar which imposes upon us belief in the entities which our way of making sentences implies, so "that when there is thought there has to be something

'that thinks' is simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed" (Eng., p. 268; Ger., p. 577). That doer, in turn, is the result of another aspect of language, namely its turning or troping, making equal or similar what are unequal or dissimilar, so that the same name is given to two "entities" which are in fact not the same. This is the primordial act of interpretation which creates language, the self, and all the entities which are based on the model of the self, in one fell swoop of metaphorizing: "The 'subject' is the fiction that many *similar* (*gleiche*) states in us are the effect of *one* substratum: but it is *we* who first *created* (*geschaffen*) the "similarity" (*Gleichheit*) of these states; our *adjusting* them (*Zurechtmachen*) and *making* them similar (*Gleich-setzen*) is the *fact*, *not* their similarity (—which ought rather to be denied—)" (Eng., p. 269; Ger., p. 627). The making similar which is hypostatized in the fiction of a substantial, enduring self becomes, in turn once more, the model for a "similar" projecting and hypostatizing by analogy, of the whole series of features of the inner and outer worlds which are presupposed in the initial presupposition or positing of the self: substance, the "reality" of the external world, causality, will, the reality, unity, and persistence of such feelings as "being in love," and so on:

Through thought the ego is posited; but hitherto one believed as ordinary people do, that in "I think" there was something of immediate certainty (*Unmittelbar-Gerwissem*), and that this "I" was the given *cause* of thought, from which by analogy we understood all other causal relationships. (Eng., pp. 267–68; Ger., p. 915)

The concept of *substance* is a consequence of the concept of the *subject*: *not* the reverse! If we relinquish the soul, "the subject," the precondition (*Voraussetzung*) for "substance" in general disappears. (Eng., p. 268; Ger., p. 627)

Must all philosophy not ultimately bring to light preconditions (*Voraussetzungen*) upon which the process of *reason* (*Vernunft*) depends?—Our *belief in the "ego"* (*das "Ich"*) as a substance, as the sole reality from which we ascribe (*zusprechen*) reality to things in general? The oldest "realism" at last comes to light: at the same time that the entire religious history of mankind is recognized as the history of the soul superstition. (Eng., p. 269; Ger., pp. 898–99)

This inexplicable tangle of hypostatized presuppositions, and presuppositions of presuppositions, each element presupposing all the others and being their presupposition in turn, in a perpetual turning or displacement, is the prison house of language. It draws a line in the sense of a limit, a frontier. This border our thinking cannot by any means cross. We can hardly even see it as a frontier, since as soon as we think, we are already inside the line, by no means at its edge. We remain enclosed within it, and hardly even, by a tremendous effort of thinking against thinking, are we able to see or think the line as a limiting edge to our thought:

Here [with our belief in the ego as substance] *we come to a limit (eine Schranke)*: our thinking itself involves this belief (with its distinctions of substance, accident; deed, doer, etc.); to let it go means: being no longer able to think (*nicht-mehr-denken-dürfen*) (Eng., p. 269; Ger., p. 899)

We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language (in dem sprachlichen Zwange); we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation (*eine Grenze als Grenze*).

Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off (abwerfen). (Eng., p. 283; Ger., p. 862)

These passages describe the situation leading to the recurrent comedy, perhaps especially prevalent in our own time, whereby a novelist, poet, artist, or philosopher—Joyce, Williams, Picasso, Heidegger, or Foucault—making a tremendous effort to cross the line, to get “beyond metaphysics” or “beyond man,” beyond the traditions of realism in fiction, or beyond the conventions of representational mimesis in painting or poetry, succeeds in the end only in pushing out the limits of the margin a little, like a balloon slightly expanded. Such a thinker or artist remains imperturbably enclosed within the invisible englobing surface, as our universe, it may be, is finite but unbounded. Like such a universe, language is a prison, airy and spacious indeed, but still a prison, though it is a prison whose walls we can never encounter, much less demolish.

Moving backwards from the entities and the connections between entities presupposed by the self to the self itself, and then from the self outwards again to its peripheral branching connections, Nietzsche performs a whole-scale dissolution of the idea of self, character, or subject. There is nothing quite so like it in English literature of the same period as the mournful litany of denials and dissolvings in the “Conclusion” to Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance*:

And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. . . . It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves.⁴

Though Pater may seem to give more substantial reality to “impressions,” as “facts” of inner experience, than Nietzsche does, he elsewhere recognizes, like Nietzsche, that impressions too are signs, interpretations, results of complex acts of simplification rather than aboriginal causes. Nietzsche, like Pater in “Apollo in Picardy,” replaces the hard substantial

single self with the notion of constantly changing multiple selves enclosed in perpetual combat or struggle for power within the receptacle of a “consciousness.” Far from being a given solid substance on the basis of which everything else in the inner world is constructed and sustained, the self is a momentary effect of a combat of forces, forces which are signs. The ego is a pure projection, changing from instant to instant as the balance of these forces shifts, in “continual transitoriness and fleetingness (*beständige Vergänglichkeit und Flüchtigkeit*)” (Eng., p. 271; Ger., p. 474). Since it is a phantasmal projection, product of an interpretation, it is not only constantly shifting, never fixed for a moment, expanding, contracting, changing its center of gravity. It is also capable of subdividing, of creating two or more centers, each of which appears to be a self. The endpoint of Nietzsche’s dismantling of the notion of the substantial self is the idea that a single body may be inhabited by multiple selves. Nietzsche’s figure for this dialogism is a dynamic, physical one. It is as though the “inner world” were an enclosed collocation of matter and energy. This system of forces inhabiting a single body may produce in its interactions the illusion not just of one selfhood, but of many:

No subject “atoms.” The sphere of a subject constantly *growing* or *decreasing*, the center of the system constantly *shifting*; in cases where it cannot organize the appropriate mass, it breaks into two parts. On the other hand, it can transform (*umbilden*) a weaker subject into its functionary without destroying it, and to a certain degree form (*bilden*) a new unity with it. No “substance,” rather something that in itself strives after greater strength, and that wants to “preserve” (“*erhalten*”) itself only indirectly (it wants to *surpass* (*überbieten*) itself—). (Eng., p. 270; Ger., p. 537)

The assumption of *one single subject* is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle (*Zusammenspiel und Kampf*) is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of *aristocracy* of “cells” in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command?

My hypothesis: The subject as multiplicity (*Das Subjekt als Vielheit*). (Eng., p. 270; Ger., p. 473)

Nietzsche here crosses back over the track I have elsewhere followed through the notion of narration until it led to the figure of dialogism as the undoing of any one-track unity in the novel. Nietzsche too doubles the monological self into two or more *logoi*. His notion of dialogism is one of his most powerful levers to displace the logocentrism of the West. Dialogism, two-mindedness, is, as Shakespeare shows in *Troilus and Cressida*, no-mindedness, unreason, madness. It is not appropriate to speak of it under the

category of *logos*, as reason, measure, ratio, mind, *Grund*, at all. Nietzsche does not do so. He substitutes for the family of logocentric terms another set of terms involving will, power, force, and interpretation, in the sense of a life-enhancing simplification and making calculable. Reason, consciousness, and logic are almost accidental consequences of the work of interpretation. They may become a dangerous constriction when new “illogical” interpretations become necessary for man’s self-preservation. In spite of the univocity of logic, each man’s body is the locus of a set of warring interpretations, or at best, according to an alternative metaphor to the physical-dynamic one, a political entity within which there is perhaps one “ruler” within the struggle for power, but a ruler dependent on the ruled and obliquely ruled by them. Such a state is a shifting balance of antagonistic forces from which the illusion of selfhood in an individual arises as a figment. This epiphenomenon, moreover, fluctuates constantly, however fixed it appears to falsifying interpretation, which wants to say, “I am I, a single self, remaining always the same”:

The *body* and physiology the starting point: why? —we gain the correct idea (*Vorstellung*) of the nature of our subject-unity, namely as regents at the head of a communality (not as “souls” or “life forces”), also of the dependence of these regents upon the ruled and of an order of rank and division of labor as the conditions that make possible the whole and its parts. In the same way, how living unities continually arise and die and how the “subject” is not eternal: in the same way, that the struggle expresses itself in obeying and commanding, and that a fluctuating assessment of the limits of power is part of life (*ein fließendes Machtgrenzen-bestimmen zum Leben gehört*). (Eng., p. 271; Ger., p. 475)

Nietzsche’s interrogation of the idea of selfhood has reached, by a complex series of dissolutions, a definition of the self as a projected, constantly changing virtuality, like the center of gravity of a moving mass. This phantasmal center, moreover, has been doubled, fragmented, multiplied, dispersed into who knows how many separate momentary centers. Each is inhabited by a will to power over the whole, a desire to dominate and be itself the center.

Who is the agent of this procedure of deconstruction? The track I have followed through Book Three of *The Will to Power* began with the text of section 477, and that text begins with the words “I maintain” (*Ich halte*). Who is this *Ich* who dismantles any notion of a substantial *Ich*? Who is the ego who says, “The subject as multiplicity is one of my hypotheses, something posited or hypothesized by me”? The aporia of Nietzsche’s strategy of deconstruction is a version of the universal aporia of deconstruction. It lies in the fact that Nietzsche must use as the indispensable lever of his act of disarticulation a positing of the entity he intends to demolish. He must affirm the thing he means to deconstruct in order to deconstruct it. The deconstruction therefore deconstructs itself. It is built over the abyss of its own impossibility. In order

to proceed with the undoing Nietzsche must begin with an act of positing which is the main target of the undoing. The whole complicated series of untyings which I have traced out, knot by knot, is strung on that initial positing.

If causality, substance, and so on, are posited on the positing of the ego, the denial of those concepts is not a replacement of falsehood by truth, the "facts," things as they are. It is an alternative series of positings based by a series of metaphorical displacements on the initial positing of the deconstructing self: *Ich halte*. In unbinding all those knots, Nietzsche does not produce a line straight and true, free of all intrication, open to eyesight and measurement, a ruler by which all crooked thinking can be measured and made straight. He produces only another complicated knot, fold on fold, implicated within itself, a labyrinth of new figures. This reversal, whereby deconstruction deconstructs itself, and at the same time creates another labyrinthine fiction whose authority is undermined by its own creation, is characteristic of all deconstructive discourse. The way in which the fiction of selfhood survives its dismantling, or is even a necessary presupposition of its own dismantling, is a striking example of this.

Department of English,
Yale University

J. Hillis Miller

NOTES

1. The first: (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977); the second: 2 vols. (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1973).

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 263–64. For the German original, I have followed Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in Drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlecta, III (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1966), pp. 673–74. Further references to *The Will to Power* will be to page numbers in these editions, identified as "Eng." and "Ger." respectively. I have sometimes slightly altered Kaufmann's translation to make it conform more closely to Nietzsche's German, for example by restoring his italics (or underlinings in the original manuscript). Like any great writer, Nietzsche is to some degree untranslatable, and I have woven some words and phrases from the original German into my citations in order to give some indication of Nietzsche's vocabulary, especially where the metaphorical force of conceptual words is different in German from the corresponding English, or where Nietzsche is playing on aspects of the German words which do not carry over into English.

3. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 80. For the German, see Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Schlecta, III, p. 311.

4. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), pp. 235–36.