Nietzsche as a (Re)Source for Self-Care: An Autistic Alexander Technique Perspective

Nietzsche como fonte para o autocuidado: Uma perspectiva da Técnica Alexander Autista

Tristan Torriani[1]

Abstract: Scientific research on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be complemented by combining qualitative methods. As a diagnosed autistic using the Alexander Technique, I initially present foundational references for an Autistic Alexander Technique perspective. After reviewing Giacoia's reconstruction of Nietzsche's depth psychology of *ressentiment* and amoral self-empowerment, I assess Nietzsche's relevance to the practical challenge of developing a self-caring lifestyle for autistics in today's world that goes beyond specialized disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, or music. My conclusion, positive for autistics, is that Nietzsche and F. M. Alexander both favored self-empowerment, psychophysical integration, and amoralism.

Keywords: Nietzsche, F.; Alexander, F. M.; Autism; Self-Care; Alexander Technique; Brazilian Pragmatism.

Resumo: A pesquisa científica sobre o Transtorno do Espectro do Autismo (TEA) pode ser complementada por uma combinação de métodos qualitativos, inclusive humanísticos. Como autista diagnosticado que usa a Técnica Alexander, apresento inicialmente algumas referências fundamentais para uma perspectiva da Técnica Alexander para autistas. Após revisar a reconstrução de Giacoia da psicologia profunda de Nietzsche sobre o ressentimento e o autoempoderamento amoral, avalio a relevância de Nietzsche para o desafio prático de desenvolver um estilo de vida com autocuidado para os autistas no mundo de hoje que vá além das disciplinas especializadas, como filosofia, psicologia ou música. Minha conclusão, positiva para os autistas, é que Nietzsche e F. M. Alexander favoreciam o autoempoderamento, a integração psicofísica e o amoralismo.

Palavras-Chave: Nietzsche, F.; Alexander, F. M.; Autismo; Autocuidado; Técnica Alexander; Pragmatismo brasileiro.

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1   Professor da Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp).

Introduction

For quite some time now, research in applied human sciences has turned away from the large-scale theorizing typical of the early 20th century. However, radical thinkers such as F. Nietzsche can still offer new insights on autism that avoid the pitfalls of what T. Kuhn called normal science. Using Brazilian research material and methodology not available in English, this paper aims to approach a few topics, such as the mind-body relation, creativity, and amoralism. I want to show that his thinking is more daring and consequential because he was unafraid to lead an argument to its ultimate conclusion. While Nietzsche's interest in and engagement with the science of his time is well-documented, he maintained a healthy critical distance from its results. He was particularly adept at reinterpreting them from a broader and deeper historical perspective. Unfortunately, being neither a scientist nor an amateur but rather a highly educated layman, his remarks would probably be ignored today.

Another reason that makes Nietzsche a worthwhile case to consider is his lifelong struggle with health issues that have not yet been definitively diagnosed. While fully understanding that health should not be treated as an end in itself but rather as a means towards human transcendence, disease remained for him, nonetheless a challenge to overcome throughout his life. Indeed, his quest for vitality went beyond autistic self-care and energy management, for it manifested as a will to power. However, this threefold articulation between psychophysical integration, non-judgmentalism, and creativity is particularly original and not sufficiently appreciated in standard scientific research. The autobiographic dimension of his writings is also relatable to the current method of experiential reports (*Erfahrungsbericht* in German, *relato de experiência* in Portuguese).

As a diagnosed autistic person (ICD 6A02.0) who uses the Alexander Technique, I have found that Nietzsche's writings promise advancement even for those whom society in general often dismisses as disabled. In my experience, his iconoclasm can be liberating. However, to explain how Nietzsche can become a (re)source for autistics, it is necessary first to describe the Alexander Technique as I understand and use it. After that, I present Oswaldo Giacoia, Jr.'s theoretical reconstruction of Nietzsche's depth psychology. This provides us with a solid scholarly foundation to show his relevance to autism.

Due to obvious space constraints, my discussion gives prominence to issues that I consider crucial. I have ordered them as linearly as I could. As an autistic, my thinking is typically rigid, literal, associative, non-linear, black or white, pattern-based, blunt, driven by special interests, inductive, analytical, and attentive to detail. This last characteristic is essential to mention. Neurotypicals tend to underestimate autistic thinking and might understandably assume that specific points that I touch upon in passing have not been thought through in detail. However, this is not the

case. It would be impossible to unpack all the details here, and I hope to do so in my upcoming papers on Brazilian Pragmatism.

F. M. Alexander and an Autistic Alexander Technique Perspective

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) was an Australian Shakespearean actor who, together with his brother Albert Redden (1874–1947), developed a powerful technique for reconstructing harmful habits and reactions based on the principle of conscious, deliberate inhibition. Although Alexander described it as "doing the work" or working on one's use of oneself, his approach was called the Alexander Technique (AT) in his honor. If we consider the dates of Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Freud (1856-1939), we can see that he is a later figure and philosophically perhaps closer to pragmatists such as W. James (1842-1910) and J. Dewey (1859-1952). Alexander and Dewey met in Boston, became friends, and influenced each other. Dewey took classes with him, was convinced of the validity of his approach, and wrote prefaces for Alexander's books *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, and *The Use of the Self*.

Unfortunately, like Nietzsche and Freud, Alexander's work was too original and practical and applied for an academic 20th-century philosophy dominated by abstract thinkers such as Frege, Russell, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. Unfortunately, Piaget's (1965) proposal to reform the curriculum of philosophy courses so that they would open up to interdisciplinary scientific research was silently acknowledged but not implemented at most universities. After the work of Hall (1984) and Hadot (2004) on ancient philosophy and its relation to living our lives holistically, we ought to have more open views that do not limit philosophy to intellectualization. For those like me who are sympathetic to Hadot's views, Alexander is far more important than the typical canonical philosophers. However, as busy as he was responding to all kinds of challenges and misunderstandings coming from all quarters concerning the original work he was developing, it made no sense for him to claim to be an academic philosopher. As in Nietzsche's and Freud's cases, the attempt to legitimize Alexander as an academic philosopher misrepresents his self-understanding, so we must leave philosophy aside. Deeply original thinkers such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Alexander brought something new to the world that would not easily fit into the established categories of their time.

Alexander Technique is a modality devoted to psychophysical re-education. Practitioners must be certified at an accredited center after a course (1600 hours of training over at least three years). They are called "teachers," and their clients are "students." In Brazil, professionals are represented by the Associação Brasileira de Técnica Alexander (ABTA), whose site is available at https://www.abtalexander.com.br/.

From an institutional point of view, the Alexander Technique has not yet found a specific place in the university curriculum because of its interdisciplinary character. As it is meant to prevent but not to cure, it does not fall within the fields of physiotherapy or occupational therapy. As its focus is somewhat more (but by no means only) mental, particularly in Mio Morales' Primal Alexander™, which emphasizes what he calls ConstructiveThinking™, the Alexander Technique cannot be reduced to gymnastics, physical education, or Hatha Yoga. The uncontrollable proliferation of other modalities, such as Rolfing® by Ida Rolf (1896–1979), the Feldenkrais Method, developed by Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984), and others, each with their own merits and limitations, but also with aims that differ significantly from Alexander's, makes it difficult to provide an adequate assessment of the field.

Alexander knew his approach could not be completely backed up by empirical science because inhibition and direction must occur at a subjective or (hetero) phenomenological level (Dennett, 1991, p. 72). A substantial challenge arose when he realized that our inner senses, such as interoception, proprioception, and the vestibular sense, were inherently unreliable, a condition which he described as "debauched kinesthesia" and "faulty sensory appreciation." This produced further difficulty in verbal communication, causing instructions such as "Let the neck be free; let the head go forward and up; let the back lengthen and widen; let the knees go forward and away" to be misunderstood. This problem is aggravated for autistic Alexander students because of their literal understanding of language (Freeman, 2014, p. 66).

Another challenge faced by disseminators of the Alexander Technique is that it categorically rejects quick fixes and what Alexander called "end-gaining," which is the attempt to achieve a result immediately without understanding what he called the "means-whereby." The quality of the process is Alexander's priority, not obtaining results, as in the Feldenkrais Method. For example, while mere self-help can be used for what Alexander called end-gaining, self-care is more concerned with the quality of life as something of intrinsic value.

Yet another unusual Alexandrian principle is non-doing, which is reminiscent of Daoism's *wu wei*. Contrary to Freud, Alexander realized that conscious and voluntary inhibitory control could be a potent resource to reconstruct harmful habits, attitudes, and postures. In addition, he was very emphatic about psychophysical unity and integration. For these reasons, the Alexander Technique cannot be reduced to a strictly intellectual, academic discipline like philosophy or psychology. Our concern for our self-care compels us to notice what is happening to our use of ourselves as we perform academic activities. How we do them matters more than what we are doing. Ultimately, a significant lifestyle change is needed to enjoy its benefits.

Dewey was thoroughly convinced of the scientific importance of Alexander's discoveries, and this encouraged Frank Pierce Jones (1905–1975), a professor of

Greek and Latin at Brown University, to research its scientifically demonstrable part. Among more recent authors, Theodore Dimon, Jr. (1999, 2015) has done significant theoretical work advancing Alexander's ideas in education, supporting the case that Alexander was the most significant educator of the 20th century. In Dewey's own words:

> The technique of Mr. Alexander gives to the educator a standard of psycho-physical health – in which what we call morality is included. It supplies also the "means whereby" this standard may be progressively and endlessly achieved, becoming a conscious possession of the one educated. It provides therefore the conditions for the central direction of all special educational processes. It bears the same relation to education that education itself bears to all other human activities (Dewey, 2020, p. 9).

Following in the steps of H. Villa-Lobos and A. Meneses, Brazilian cellist Pedro de Alcantara (2011, 2013, 2021) has written extensively on Alexander Technique's application to life in general, but also to the cello as a pedagogical tool with much broader philosophical potential than expected, as once suggested by Paul Tortelier (1914-1990) in one of his masterclasses. Although it generally receives less attention than the violin or the guitar, the violoncello can cover the whole range of the human voice, making it indispensable to illustrate the possibilities of musical aesthetics and expression. Its ergonomics is arguably healthier than the violin's or the guitar's, and many cello methods, such as Victor Sazer's, integrate the Alexander Technique. Sometimes, as in Anzél Gerber's case, the emphasis is on ease without mentioning the Alexander Technique explicitly. Exciting studies on fingerboard mapping by violinist Terje Moe Hansen and intonation systems by cellists Hans Jørgen Jensen and Minna Rose Chung (CelloMind approach) exemplify advances in instrumental knowledge. However, a fundamental distinction between the cello as the secondary instrument and the self as the primary instrument is crucial. Alcantara explains this concept with a practical example:

> I play on somebody else's cello; I find it difficult to make it sound like my own instrument; I try to make it conform to my musical and technical wishes by using my arms in unfamiliar ways; in the process I neglect the coordination of my head, neck, and back; I begin to use my arms ever more inefficiently; my playing worsens. The solution lies in aiming for the best possible coordination of my whole self in the circumstances. I can play the crappy cello well only by using myself well while playing it! A twisted neck and stiff shoulders won't make the cello sound better. Instead of letting the crappy cello make me do bad things to myself, I do good things to the crappy cello. I'm at the center, the cello is at the periphery; to work on myself is to connect with the center, the better to navigate the periphery (Alcantara, 2013, p.158).

For this reason, much as musicians may want to put their instruments first, giving them total priority leads to a counterproductive imbalance in coordination.

In such cases, our attention is split between a hyperfocus on the task (or the *what*) we are doing to the detriment of our general use of ourselves (or the *how*). Instead, the Alexander Technique proposes prioritizing the general well-being of our whole selves, understood as primary instruments. In this sense, it is holistic and pragmatic.

For students on the autistic spectrum, Caitlin G. Freeman (2014) pioneered the adaptation of Alexander Technique procedures to autistic needs. Dorita S. Berger (2016) has contributed to music therapy for autistics based on Jacques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics. In general, autistic musicians are challenged by issues such as sensory processing (e.g., dealing with background noise interference), social interaction, authentic communication, masking, scripting, repetitive behaviors (e.g., using the musical instrument to stim instead of practicing deliberately), executive functioning, pathological demand avoidance, anxiety, and stress. Autistic cellists such as Elisabeth Wiklander (LSO), Adam Mandela Walden, and Jeong-Hyeon Lee contribute to neurodivergent advocacy by sharing their talent with the general public.

Alexander Technique lessons usually involve physical contact. F. M. and A. R. Alexander realized that purely verbal instruction did not work. For example, they would ask their student to raise her head forward and up, and she would do the opposite. The cause of this problem is that once we get accustomed to particular movements, they become habitual and unconscious. However, besides that, as we grow, our interoception and proprioception become increasingly uncoordinated. Not only do we lose the coordination we had as children, but we also learn words equivocally associated with certain bodily sensations. We are taught "postures" that are uncomfortable and physically unsustainable. F. M.'s solution was to use the tips of his fingers to slightly nudge the student's head to suggest what bringing the head forward and up could mean. Henceforth, touch would become the primary means of kinesthetic communication, as it were. Thus, the standard hands-on approach, which we can call the Alexander Technique 1.0 ("AT 1.0"), was born.

However, Mio Morales, a certified Alexander teacher, started noticing certain limitations in AT 1.0. One of them was the student's dependence on the teacher to provide kinesthetic suggestions for a better use of oneself. This posed a deeper problem. How did Alexander himself come upon his approach? He described this in the first chapter of *The Use of the Self* ("The Evolution of a Technique"). Initially, he used mirrors to identify what could be going wrong with his vocal tract and noticed that he pulled his head back. This led to a more profound realization about how inhibition was necessary to develop another coordination and neural pathway, which Alexander called, in the title of one of his books, the "conscious constructive control of the individual." The use of touch was a late development forced upon the Alexander brothers as they sought to disseminate the idea of working upon our use of ourselves. Unfortunately, touch came to be regarded as the cornerstone of the technique.

Morales realized that touch could not become the be-all and end-all of AT. Something was lacking, and it was more fundamental, which Alexander did to himself. Morales called it ConstructiveThinking™. He proposed that the essential part of AT required us to open ourselves to easing. The best way to do this would be by posing the question, "Where else do I seem to be easing a bit?" Instead of proactively seeking ease, which would put us in an end-gaining mindset, treating ease as a goal, he suggested that mindfulness would be receptive. Morales pointed out that by directing our attention to apparent points of ease, we can avoid depending too much on faulty inner senses. At the same time, it also counterbalances the tendency to prioritize pain.

Violinist Jennifer Roig-Francolí (2023) then developed a systematic application of Mio Morales' Primal Alexander™ hands-off approach called The Art of Freedom® Method. This brought about what we can call AT 2.0, which emphasizes the student's activating his or her openness to easing. Students can be taught online to practice awareness études meant to avoid end-gaining. Online instruction and the hands-off approach can be more attractive for autistics because light touch can be irritating. Caitlin G. Freeman's solution for this problem is to use deep touch in hands-on AT 1.0.

In Brazil, Eleni Vosniadou (2019) has taught a combination of hands-on and hands-off (generally online) courses in Portuguese. One of her students, Karina C. Petry (2020), wrote an academic dissertation on optimizing musical performance using the experiential report research format that has recently been codified by Mussi et al. (2021). An experiential report need not be restricted to a chronological description of personal experience. In this philosophical paper, for example, I dwell on my experience only when it helps to elicit my hitherto hidden bias, making it transparent. Therefore, although the experiential report may generate a perception of subjectivity, its transparency keeps it honest. Unfortunately, this methodological concept was unavailable at Alexander's time, although Dewey already understood it.

In addition, Djamila Ribeiro (2017), following authors such as Gayatri Spivak, has developed the concept of standpoint or place of speech (in Portuguese, *lugar de fala*), which encourages individuals belonging to minorities, such as autistics, to present their requests and demands. With the concept of standpoint, it becomes possible to establish a self-conscious perspective like the one I am attempting here. If I am forbidden from disclosing that I am autistic because that would be subjective, then I automatically lose access to my background meaning. My speech becomes deracinated. A neurotypical reader confronted with my thinking will dismiss it as rigid, superficial, or even illogical. Adopting an explicitly autistic standpoint retrieves context that would be otherwise lacking.

In a recent empirical study, Sandra C. Jones (2023) collected advice from autistic academics on how to deal with the main challenges faced by autistic

university students. She identified five main pieces of advice. The first, "know the role," consists of becoming acquainted with all the demands of an academic career as soon as possible. The second, "find the right people," means associating with autistics or neurotypicals who can provide support and co-regulation. The third, "know and value yourself," emphasizes resilience in the face of competition and judgment in a neurotypical environment. The fourth, "maintain balance," addresses balance not only between life and work, which is a central concern of self-care, but also between competing demands within the work environment, which Gabriele Griffin (2022) calls "work-work balance" and credits to Western universities' neo-liberalization. The fifth, "proceed with caution but with passion," suggests that autistic special interests can be a strength if not too rigid.

All of these contributions provide the foundation for what can be called an Autistic Alexander Technique (AAT) perspective. As a student of the Alexander Technique, I have taken hands-on or AT 1.0 classes with Izabel Padovani and online AT 2.0 classes with Eleni Vosniadou, Jennifer Roig-Francolí, and Mio Morales. I have also contacted Caitlin Freeman by e-mail to express my appreciation for her work. In my experience, Morales' awareness études dramatically increased my ability to notice my autistic functioning, which is an essential first step to improving self-care.

Nietzsche as a psychologist: Giacoia's theoretical reconstruction

Since autism is generally acknowledged to be primarily a mental health problem, it is essential to leave academic philosophy aside for a moment and return to it later from an Autistic Alexander Technique perspective. In his magisterial four-part essay, the noted Brazilian Nietzsche scholar Prof. Dr. Oswaldo Giacoia, Jr. (Giacoia, 2001, p. 15-100) provides a thorough systematic reconstruction of the main points regarding Nietzsche's psychology of *ressentiment*, according to the following outline. In the first section, Giacoia reviews the work of previous commentators, most notably W. Kaufmann, who acknowledged the importance of psychology to Nietzsche. He then goes on to clarify Nietzsche's surprising claim to be the "first" psychologist in history. In the second section, Giacoia addresses Nietzsche's critique of Platonism and his radical rejection of even its slightest remnant, which he believes to find in materialistic atomism. In the third section, Giacoia explains Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the Will, the notion of a composite self, and (a)morality. Until this point, Giacoia clarifies that all this constituted the negative task of Nietzsche's new psychology. In the fourth and last section, he presents the positive side, which consists of overcoming *ressentiment* and slave morality. Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* is referenced because it also helps to explain how Nietzsche, despite his claim to originality, had to admit his debt to the Russian novelist.

Section I

Giacoia highlights an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, Nietzsche's claim to be the first psychologist of Europe and, on the other hand, his admission that he learned at least some psychology from Dostoevsky's writings. In addition, Nietzsche's claim to be first flies in the face of at least two other well-known facts: (a) the existence of rational psychology as a traditional area of metaphysics; and (b) the then recent development of experimental and clinical psychology, and its struggle for independence from philosophy. How can we make sense of this awkward situation? Couldn't he have hedged his claim at least a little? Claiming to be the first psychologist means not only being the absolute best of his time but also implies denial or disdain for everything that preceded him.

Before judging whether Nietzsche was arrogant or pretentious, it is essential to appreciate his radical critique of traditional metaphysical assumptions. Once this is understood, his extravagance may be forgiven. The first critical point to be considered is Nietzsche's rejection of the criterion for psychological phenomena that requires (self)-consciousness as a necessary condition. In other words, like Freud, Nietzsche accepted the possibility of extending the criterion of the psychical to the realm of the unconscious. (Self)-consciousness becomes neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for something to be a psychological phenomenon. This is undoubtedly a significant conceptual change, and Giacoia effectively contrasts it with a quote from Paul Janet, in which consciousness is assigned to a subjective sphere. At the same time, only physiology is granted an objective status. Nietzsche rejected not only the dualistic split between the subjective and the objective but also the exclusion of the unconscious from psychology.

However, is this recognition of the unconscious sufficient to justify Nietzsche's claim to be the first psychologist of Europe? Not. Giacoia points out that Nietzsche was not the first to criticize the identity between consciousness and the psyche. He appropriately quotes Freud, who did not make such a claim but more reasonably chose to present himself as the creator of psychoanalysis as a new field. Freud distinguished between the two systems, conscious and unconscious, without either being reducible to (or identifiable with) physiology, which was already a revolutionary conceptual break with traditional psychology. Although this distinction introduced a new dualism into the study of the psyche, it attempted to establish the unconscious as the basis for a new kind of scientific (i.e., psychoanalytic or psychodynamic) explanation.

Thus, Giacoia takes Freud's example as a reason why Nietzsche might have found himself justified in claiming to be the first psychologist. On the one hand, it is reasonable to assume that Nietzsche could anticipate the enormous consequences the adoption of the unconscious would have for psychology and philosophy. However, if you compare him to Freud and his vast influence in the 20th century,

Nietzsche's claim is still exaggerated. One thing is to foresee significant scientific developments, and another is to bring them about and put them into practice as Freud did. Nietzsche seems to have been more of a visionary in this sense, not the first full-blown professional psychologist. If we were to grant him his wish, how would we do justice to Freud? If Nietzsche were the first psychologist, what would we call Freud? Although Giacoia is methodologically right in trying to make sense of Nietzsche's claim within his writings and self-understanding, it is only possible to maintain a critical distance from Nietzsche's egomania and self-deception by considering a broader social and historical context.

Nietzsche's claim to be the first psychologist remains unconvincing, but this should not mislead us to underestimate the depth of his critique of Western metaphysics and Christian morality. Giacoia draws particular attention to aphorism §23 of *Beyond Good and Evil* (Nietzsche, 1988, p.38-39) because it contains a nutshell statement of Nietzsche's project.

One point concerns what Nietzsche calls perspectivism, which rejects the naive realism of traditional metaphysics and the conventional subject-object distinction promoted by modern, post-Cartesian epistemology. Although often equated with relativism, Nietzsche's formulation is self-consistent and not self-contradictory. While he denied any absolute criterion, he was also willing to downgrade his stance to a perspective. Concerning Platonism and the relationship between psychology and theology, Giacoia (Giacoia, 2001, p.27-30) distinguishes between an inversion (in Portuguese, *inversão*) and a reversion (in Portuguese, *reversão*). A reversion would be a mere swapping of places, such as when the inferior takes the place of the superior without any significant transformation. However, an inversion would entail more than just that because Nietzsche's new psychology, for example, would not only take the place of theology but would also destroy its legitimacy by explaining it away scientifically (or at least psychodynamically).

Perspectivism, if understood as the thesis that we do not have direct access to reality as it would be absolutely in itself, implies that persons must contend with mental and linguistic mediation to attain knowledge (defined as true justified belief). Following Kant, some current scientific approaches endorse perspectivism by acknowledging the existence of an external world without seeing the need to prove it. This combination of perspectivism and realism can be called perspectival realism (Ros, 2005, p. 37-42).

However, as Giacoia notes, Nietzsche's perspectivism is bound to his (hypo) thesis regarding the existence of a will to power in humans as living beings. Nihilism could be overcome by a psychology that adopted a new conceptual framework that treated persons not as selves split between mind and body but as a complex composite set of forces. Instead of mind-body dualism and a privileged status for consciousness, this new psychology could now handle an expanded view of

rationality. The unconscious and the body would be regarded as the primary, and the spirit would be regarded as a secondary or derivative reason (or rationalization). Lastly, contrary to esoteric Christians such as Max Heindel, Nietzsche advocated that all moral scruples related to the heart could and should be abandoned to advance this new psychology. Giacoia explains that as part of the process of inversion of values, new psychologists would need to deal with the intolerable possibility or fact that apparently good drives actually originated from bad ones. Thus, advancing science would require disconnecting from a heart bound to Christian, Islamic, or Buddhist values.

Nietzsche's new psychology would replace theology and any other secular metaphysics designed to provide comfort or consolation not just because these latter contained noble lies but because of their decadent weakness. Giacoia shows that such continuity, although at first sight implausible, given the considerable differences between medieval theocentrism and modern anthropocentrism, was tracked down by Nietzsche in modern concepts such as those of the atom and the unity of consciousness. Without a clean break with Platonism and Christianity, he preferred to err on the side of assuming continuity, regardless of how scientific and materialistic thinkers would profess to be. Nietzsche treated this break as a necessity for progress and a matter of choice that distinguishes the weak from the strong. Thus, to further his radical scientific and political project, Nietzsche attacked traditional Platonic Christianity and even atomistic materialism.

To reconstruct Nietzsche's articulation between (self)-consciousness, language, and society, Giacoia refers to aphorism §354, Book V, of *The Merry Science*. In this passage, Nietzsche suggests that the best way to approach the problem of self-consciousness is to begin with physiology and zoology because these sciences describe what it would be like for us not to be self-aware. He believes these sciences show that we could live without self-consciousness and infers that it is disposable both as a concept and a phenomenon.

As an aside, this point Nietzsche makes is overly simplistic from a current scientific standpoint. From a materialistic point of view, it is correct to say that psychological states and processes never exist in themselves as a different mental substance. However, to describe and discern sensorimotor abilities, we, as speakers, need concepts attributed externally under certain conditions (whether necessary or sufficient). Another critical point is that self-consciousness is more complex than simple consciousness. Animals are generally acknowledged to possess consciousness, in other words, to be conscious beings as they interact with the world, including other animals. However, only a few animal species can be said to attain consciousness of themselves beyond recognizing themselves in a mirror, for example.

To highlight atomistic materialism's backwardness, Nietzsche praised Leibniz's panpsychism (i.e., the view that the mind pervades all things) for including both

the representational *perceptio* and the conative *apetitus* in the monad. If the monad already contained all this, then unconscious behavior was theoretically possible. A whole life could be lived without "entering" our consciousness, a spatial metaphor that Nietzsche disliked. His next step is to extend the idea of unconscious life beyond mere "lower" vegetative existence into the supposedly "higher" sphere of thought, will, and emotion, thus denying Kant's unity of consciousness as something that necessarily accompanies all representations.

To prove his point that consciousness is not a necessary property of the concept of mind, Nietzsche proposed the hypothesis that the refinement of consciousness depended on the *ability* to communicate, which in turn depended on the *need* to communicate. He sought the causal explanation of this last factor in a collective constraint, as opposed to something like an individual's achievement (say, the works of great poets such as Homer, Laozi, Virgil, Rudaki, Dante, Goethe, or Pushkin).

Giacoia explains that Nietzsche's genealogical (or, one might say, paleoanthropological) method proposed a hypothetical pre-history marked by scarcity that contrasted with and explained our current abundance of cultural resources. Nietzsche presented this wealth as something waiting to be squandered by artists such as Wagner. Giacoia adds that Nietzsche wanted to go beyond a Darwinian view of scarcity ruled by a concern for mere survival.

Nietzsche's hypothesis, then, was that the development of consciousness ultimately depended on its ability to satisfy the need for communication in a way that would be useful for society. However, this need for communication itself highlighted the human individual's insufficiency. Nietzsche admitted that, first of all, the person requires self-reflective consciousness to become aware of his or her needs. Only then can these needs be communicated to others.

I want to object at this point that if Nietzsche wanted to causally explain the refinement of consciousness, by which one would include the achievement of self-consciousness as a process constrained by social utility, his admission that self-consciousness was a necessary condition for individuals to share their needs in communication already defeats his purpose because it introduces a circle or *petitio principii*. For self-consciousness to be causally explained without circularity, Nietzsche would have to show how it arose from a combination of other simpler elements. He cannot assume that individuals already possess self-consciousness. Animals with only simple consciousness feel pain or hunger and may communicate these states to others through sign language. However, this has yet to lead to their development of rich linguistic systems as humans have. The refinement of self-consciousness cannot be reduced to or traced back to bodily sensations alone. When animals communicate their pain by screeching, for example, they do not necessarily present themselves as selves to other animals but may trigger responses in their interlocutors. As G. H. Mead, M. Merleau-Ponty, L. Wittgenstein, L. Vygotsky,

and others would argue after Nietzsche, the human self we are acquainted with arises in an intersubjective space that includes linguistic and bodily interaction.

Giacoia's careful reconstruction allows us to understand how Nietzsche saw the relationship between self-consciousness, language, and society. Giacoia also shows that when Nietzsche argued critically and polemically, he mainly was trying to prove the contingency (as R. Rorty (2013) would have put it), as opposed to the necessity of certain concepts or theories. One would typically expect a philosopher to argue for the necessity of their concepts or theories. Nietzsche could not and would not do that because it would contradict his perspectivism. So, he argued for the contingency of the views he opposed, adding provocation, irony, sarcasm, and other rhetorical devices to the mix. In this sense, I agree that Nietzsche was an original, self-consistent philosopher and a pioneer of depth psychology or psychoanalysis. However, as an autistic person, I am not interested in the poetic or emotional dimension but only in the literal aspect of his arguments.

What emerges from Giacoia's reconstruction is that Nietzsche clings to the myth of subjective depth that became implausible after what could be called the intersubjective (not only linguistic) turn in the early 20th century. As much as he tried to free himself from previous thought, his view that natural language could only carry superficial meaning is also present in Plato, Descartes, Locke, and Kant. The difference lies mainly in Nietzsche's emphasis on the unconscious. However, he still treats language as a derivative or secondary source of meaning. For Plato and Aristotle, the meaning of, respectively, ideas and essences lay in a transcendent metaphysical reality. For early moderns such as Descartes, Locke, and Kant, the meaning of ideas lay in our minds or a supra-personal pure reason. For Nietzsche and Freud, the most profound source of meaning originates in the unconscious mind. The continuity lies in that both early moderns, Kant, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, and de Saussure, are mentalistic, i.e., they all give precedence to the mind before language in the construction of meaning.

In contrast, L. Wittgenstein, G. H. Mead, M. Merleau-Ponty, L. Vygotsky, and others realized that sensorimotor (J. Piaget, W. James, F. M. Alexander) and linguistic interaction were indispensable as a precondition for the development of a self (Joas, 1989, p.108-109). Even our most abstract mathematical concepts have to be negotiated in natural language, i.e., in a linguistic impure a priori (Ros, 1991; Sikka, 2013), because there is no demonstrable direct access through mental intuition to their meaning (Lewis, 1923, p.15-17). For this reason, post-Wittgensteinian analysts such as P. M. S. Hacker (Hacker and Bennett, 2009, p.80) and A. Ros (Ros, 2005, p.91-93) have developed philosophical normative sociolinguistics in which metaphysical and conceptual confusions (such as the mereological fallacy in which one says that the brain, instead of the person, does this or that) are avoided by paying close attention to daily linguistic usage.

A further complication arises from the fact that autistics suffer from alexithymia (difficulty in describing feelings and sensations) along with other verbal challenges, and the availability of proper terminology is critical for self-care ("name it to tame it"). In this sense, it is not true that public language cannot be refined to assist people with special conditions. On the contrary, its absence would disable autistics even more. Nietzsche misses this empowering potential in language because his narrow vision excludes people with disabilities for being "weak".

Indeed, consciousness could not, for Nietzsche, enjoy an exalted status as a faculty because of its (paleo)anthropological genesis under natural and social constraints. Consciousness could provide an essential mental representation of thoughts, desires, and so on for the person to reflect upon as a self (which begs the question of how the self appears). However, he also claimed that consciousness can only manifest what can be communicated, so it filters out what cannot. In other words, natural language, which is publicly accessible, sets a limit to which subjective needs can be expressed. Only rudimentary needs will find proper utterances if the natural public language is poor. Moreover, the limits of language act preemptively, hindering the expression of subtler needs not only to others but even to oneself. Thus, the realm of consciousness is limited to banal perspectives.

After the intersubjective turn, the proposition that there is a subjective depth, regardless of whether conscious or unconscious, cannot be established without resorting to interaction by sensorimotor or linguistic means. The concept of subjective depth assumes something like a private language inaccessible to others. However, it does not realize that what is inaccessible to others would not be accessible to us either. Nevertheless, if we lack the means to access this inner depth, then our claim to its existence is flawed. The conclusion is that if there is anything deep at all for us to express, we can only become aware of that situation because we are already making use of a public language. Nietzsche did not realize that without a pre-existing "superficial" intersubjectivity, there could not be any subjective depth at all. It is important to emphasize that this mistake concerning privacy does not exclude the possibility of discerning depth. We can still judge something as deep or superficial depending on what criteria we adopt. However, whatever criterion we decide to use will have to have been learned within the context of a superficial intersubjective interaction.

Unfortunately, the circularity of Nietzsche's causal explanation of the emergence of self-consciousness and his attachment to pre-linguistic and private mental (albeit unconscious) depth led him to a doubtful view in which consciousness, language, and society become, as it were, agents of inauthenticity in our lives. In principle, he thought, our actions as persons are individual and unique. However, when brought to consciousness, they would cease to be individuals. Why? Because only that which is expressible in a public language can be brought to consciousness,

and that, by definition, has to be helpful to the greatest number. According to Nietzsche, the order of causation begins with social needs, which force us to develop communicative skills that, in turn, refine (self)-consciousness. So he goes from the biological (or physiological) to the linguistic, and only then to the mental, and in this sense, there is something like a partial linguistic turn in Nietzsche because he places language before the mind. However, according to Giacoia's reconstruction, the unconscious mind remains a prior source of authenticity, as "a savior from the herd," perhaps even his version of an (Anti?)-Christ figure. So, it is not a complete linguistic turn.

Nietzsche's notoriously negative attitude towards society was sustained (or at least rationalized) by his commitment to authenticity and depth. However, it was also justified by his argument concerning the contingency and transience of society, language, and consciousness. He was evidently resentful that strong, healthy, and creative individuals become hostages to inauthentic standards that are historically bound to fade away someday. Society's right to "cancel" individuals is particularly dubious in light of modern liberal democracy, which theoretically guarantees individual rights and limits governmental power by checks and balances. However, Nietzsche's perception was that, despite the *de jure* promotion of individual and equal rights, what happened *de facto* in modern constitutional monarchies and republics was a rise of collectivism (such as anarchism, socialism, communism, and nationalism). He envisaged a greater kind of politics beyond petty oligarchic interests (as seen in bribes and corruption). This required a total rejection or inversion of French revolutionary values to affirm inequality, to understand freedom as a will to power, and possibly to reject the idea of human brotherhood altogether.

Nietzsche's willingness to regard society from such an indifferent or disengaged perspective might seem autistic. As is well-known, autistics tend to be socially avoidant or asocial, which ought to be distinguished from being anti-social. In addition, autistics experience varying degrees of (hyper)-empathy, which painfully conflicts with socially avoidant behavior. This creates an apparent contradiction, which in turn produces misunderstanding, hurt feelings, and cognitive dissonance between friends who are neurotypical and neurodivergent. Could Nietzsche have been autistic? It is difficult to tell because of his comorbidities, which apparently included syphilis, which was regrettably common in his generation. His struggle against empathy may, on the one hand, betray his tendency towards it or, on the other hand, be a vengeful reaction against society because of his multiple frustrations. In my personal experience as an autistic, I admit that hyperempathy does create difficulty in finding an adequate behavioral response to my overly intense emotional response. In such cases, Nietzsche's advice sounds helpful. However, I am not convinced that a total elimination of empathy would make me a better person, regardless of what "better" would mean.

One may wonder about the epistemological impact of Nietzsche's (hypo) theses. Giacoia addresses this in the last part of the first section of his essay. As we saw earlier, individual consciousness is distorted or falsified by natural language, which serves our primary collective interests. Therefore, Nietzsche concluded that we lack a proper organ for knowing reality. What we actually do is make decisions according to our perception of what is valuable. In other words, conscious knowledge expressed in language cannot convey objective reality. Our conceptual frameworks, whether compromised by phenomenalism, phenomenology, or perspectivism, betray our perceived collective interests. His view looks highly skeptical and decisionistic.

Nietzsche made it clear that he was neither concerned with (a) the subject-object distinction because it remains stuck in the popular metaphysics defined by traditional grammar nor with (b) the phenomenon-noumenon distinction because we lack the cognitive means to distinguish appearance and reality. Natural language is not only unable to describe ultimate reality, it is an impediment. Nietzsche also dismissed mystical, metaphysical insight as a delusion.

Giacoia explains that the logical aim of Nietzsche's critique of traditional metaphysics was not to refute it in the sense of showing that it was wrong in one way or another and then substitute it for something else, like a Kantian-Copernican turn to a supra-personal pure *a priori* epistemic subject ("Reason"). His objections only sought to refute the claim of logical necessity underlying traditional metaphysics, particularly Platonism. For him, it was sufficient to establish its contingency. Once that was achieved, the rest would follow.

To undermine the logical necessity of metaphysics, Giacoia points out that Nietzsche distinguished between self-conscious reason, which would be a deceptive phenomenon because its abstract concepts could not grasp concrete reality, and a larger reason, understood as unconscious rationality, that causally conditions the former. The result is that epistemology suffers a blow in the process because self-conscious reason is revealed to be a producer of fiction. This is more radical than a fictionalism of the kind H. Vaihinger proposed because Nietzsche decided to take what we would call a naturalistic turn by treating the mind as a paleoanthropological and psychodynamic entity. In so far as he had an epistemology at all, it was a naturalized one. In this sense, Nietzsche also broke with the traditional epistemological concern for justification. Causal psychodynamic explanations substituted foundational (transcendental) arguments. So, while Nietzsche stressed that we are constantly thinking but unaware of it, he also made a point of saying that what comes to consciousness is just the surface phenomenon that is meant for base public utility.

Giacoia admits the hypothetical status of Nietzsche's claims but draws attention to his self-consistency because he agreed to downgrade his argument's status. Self-reflection on Nietzsche's assumptions deepens recognition of one's contingency.

Section II

In the second part of his theoretical reconstruction, Giacoia details Nietzsche's radical attempt to achieve a complete break with Platonic assumptions. His dislike for Socrates and Plato went way beyond any previous thinker in the history of Philosophy, and it seems fair to say that he was an extreme anti-Platonist. To the extent that European Philosophy is "a series of footnotes to Plato," as A. N. Whitehead once suggested, this creates several difficulties that Giacoia's reconstruction contributes a lot to reveal.

The first problem is that Nietzsche was so obsessed with not allowing the least remnant of Platonism to survive that he sought to find it even in modern scientific atomistic materialism, absurd and false as this may seem at first sight. Giacoia's reconstruction of Nietzsche's argument is crucial to assessing whether his claim was justified or merely delusional.

As we saw earlier, Nietzsche's interest had a positive and a negative side. On the positive side, he wanted to explore the possibilities opened up by the concept of unconscious conditioning upon our thoughts and actions. In this sense, he was a pioneer of psychodynamic theory. On the negative side, he manifested an intense dislike for approaches that, to him, seemed escapist. By overvaluing the unity of consciousness and by identifying the psyche only with its conscious part, modern thinkers were, in his view, still clinging to a deified entity that would link us to a transcendent world, much like Plato's spirit (νοῦς).

How can we respond to this? If Nietzsche refers to ancient and modern forms of dualism, such as Plato and Descartes, then his argument is plausible and undeniable. However, it turns out to be a strained analogy when extended to materialistic monism. Contrary to Descartes, who may have even considered God a third substance beyond mind and matter, making him a substance pluralist, materialistic monism treats everything as immanent, not transcendent. This is a matter of indisputable logic and is valid a priori. However, that is just the beginning of Nietzsche's argument.

Giacoia quotes aphorism §12, Book I, *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche made a daring observation concerning atomistic materialism. As we saw earlier, he rejected Direct (or naive) Realism, i.e., the proposition that we can know or cognitively access an independent reality as it is in itself without depending on some sensory, mental, or linguistic mediation. His rejection is because (self)-consciousness and language are debased by collective interests, which compromise our perceptions. We are all caught in a web of perspectives and interpretations. To be self-consistent, we cannot even make this claim with certainty. In addition, he objected that those, like Kant, who claim to possess a table of categories and judgments that supposedly grasp reality are committing a *petitio principii* because they cannot vouch for its objectivity. When Nietzsche applied his perspectivism to

modern science, he doubted that it had been able to really "read the book of Nature," as it claimed. The "text" modern science produced was just another interpretation.

Much as he praised Leibniz earlier, Nietzsche then mentioned Copernicus and Boscovich favorably in §12 because their scientific results would have freed us from a fetishistic attachment to external sensory experience. Copernicus reconstructed the available evidence to prove, against the most obvious interpretation of our external senses, that the Sun moves around the Earth and not the other way around. He showed us that the Earth's stability was illusory. Boscovich made it unnecessary to believe in stable matter or stuff ("*Stoff*") by using the concepts of the force field and action at a distance. What Nietzsche seems to be celebrating here, however, is instead the loss of any remnant of stability. He wanted an utterly fluid situation and was displeased that empirical science still provided some anchor point, reduced as it may be to external sensory perception.

This is interesting because it clarifies three limitations to what Nietzsche can achieve with his arguments. First, he cannot prove that atomistic materialism prolongs dualistic transcendentalism. What he does is project a psychological need for stability upon its theoretical assumption that there is an ultimate and inaccessible reality called stuff or matter. His psychological insight is tinged with emotional rejection but falls short of a logical argument. Monism is immanentist by definition. Materialism negates spiritualism. There is no transcendence, and if monism is materialistic, all psychological and spiritual phenomena are emergent properties and are attributed conditionally, following criteria whose necessity and sufficiency need to be negotiated by speakers in natural language.

A second limitation is that Nietzsche did not completely refute atomistic materialism. As noted earlier, what he did was to show the contingency (or non-necessity) of materialism. For him, it was sufficient that Boscovich provided a theoretical alternative showing that the concept of matter was unnecessary. However, proving the contingency of a concept just relativizes things; it does not refute it in a total sense. Nevertheless, he dismissed materialism as if it had been thoroughly refuted.

Having said that, Nietzsche undoubtedly had a point concerning the continuity between ancient (Plato) and modern (Descartes, A. Kardec, M. Heindel) forms of transcendent dualism because he identified the link in what he called soul-atomism. Instead of this revered ancient concept of an eternal and indestructible soul, he wanted to propose other theoretical alternatives, such as the concept of the soul as a mortal, composite, and social construction of drives and affects. All of this is commendable and to his merit as a pioneer of psychodynamic theory.

However, here comes the third limitation: I argue that Nietzsche did not deal adequately with the exoteric-esoteric distinction in his critique of Platonism and Christianity. I also see this shortcoming in his critique of Wagner's *Parsifal*. His

notorious and undisguised disdain for everything collective makes it unnecessary to argue about why he rejected exoteric Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. However, if we are at all concerned about human potential in general, it is clear that followers of these religions still find in them resources for making sense of their lives in the 21st century. Nietzsche's stance is not humanitarian but rather anti- or post-humanistic. Therefore, for him, pointing out that exoteric religions still have sensemaking potential and other benefits for billions of people today is irrelevant. So far, so good.

However, dismissing everything exoteric does not exhaust the possibilities of esoteric approaches that enjoin us to seek development through progressive stages of initiation. On the esoteric side, it is known that Nietzsche was temporarily a member, together with his friend Paul Deussen (1845-1919), of the Frankonia Burschenshaft, a university fraternity at Bonn. He retained a facial dueling scar (*Schmiss*, in German) on the bridge of his nose after participating in the *Mensur*, a traditional fencing ritual meant to prepare young men physically and mentally for challenging situations in life. However, Nietzsche soon left this organization. His further spiritual development was obtained by finding friends, mentors, and influences. If we take initiation more spiritually as M. Heindel does, we can say that figures such as Schopenhauer, Wagner, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, and others were his initiators.

The problem of Christianity is too extensive to be adequately dealt with here. In his other book, *Labyrinths of the Soul*, Giacoia (1997) proposes another thorough reconstruction of how Christianity, according to Nietzsche, implodes by giving rise to a will for truth and intellectual honesty that lead to a loss of meaning and belief in its values. This self-suppression of Christianity is an immanent process. However, it is mostly intellectually driven.

In contrast, Heindel (1911) proposed a balance between the heart, mind, and body directed towards epigenesis, which goes beyond the mere unfolding of latent potential, typical of involution and evolution, and generates something godlike and new. Esoteric Christianity acknowledges the possibility of unknown, hidden, or occult factors not yet grasped by modern empirical science. In abstract thought, new information may require significant revision, as in the case of defeasible inferences in non-monotonic logic. For example, we may defeasibly infer from the fact that penguins are birds that they fly. We must know that although all penguins are birds, not all birds fly. According to the principle of charitable interpretation, although several Neo-Platonic (or Plotinian) propositions, such as emanationism, substance pluralism, and cycles of rebirth, are not scientifically tenable, they may still become meaningful in unexpected ways. In this sense, it is better, as Heindel suggested, to keep our minds open.

Unfortunately, though, Heindel does fall into the trap of soul-atomism. Nietzsche claims that rejecting soul-atomism is categorically necessary if we want

to leave Platonism behind. However, if "simple people" can evolve as individuals following esoteric Christianity, what is so wrong with that, and why should we care if that is their only available option? Again, Nietzsche's post-humanism loses sight of a general improvement in the human condition and limits itself to exceptional cases. A hypothetical imperative would be more appropriate here than a categorical rejection of exoteric religion.

Nietzsche's discussion of asceticism does not sufficiently address its esoteric and initiatory dimension. This is understandable because this information is, by definition, not publicly available. However, since Nietzsche's time, several Gnostic teachings have been disseminated. As is well-known, their main point was to elevate individuals or couples towards an ecstatic experience of divine immortality that made an intellectual demonstration of life after death unnecessary. The couple's dyadic vital energy needed to be harnessed and alchemically transmuted by chastity, charity, and tantric love to achieve this purpose. Despite all that Nietzsche wrote about Dionysus, the issue of sex magic, though undoubtedly familiar to him in some way, remained limited to being an attempt by the weak to impose their will upon the stronger or upon Nature itself.

In the end, Giacoia explains that Nietzsche's primary concern is opening the way for the new (depth) psychologist. To achieve deep reflection, he is bound to be marginalized and will probably share the fate of poets and other artists as squanderers of linguistic wealth. In other words, while normal science remains attached to the interests of the herd and the scruples of the heart (Heindel), the new psychologist will have to struggle with discovery (*finden*) and invention (*erfinden*).

Section III

The third part of Giacoia's reconstruction deals with the concept of the will to power as it functions with a composite self that is, to a considerable degree, unconscious. As we saw earlier, Nietzsche seeks to disprove the necessity of dualistic, transcendent philosophies and welcomes scientific theories suggesting uncertainty and instability. However, he also urges his readers to accept his view of what is necessary, i.e., the rejection of Platonism and Christianity. This leads him to accuse Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer of elevating an exoteric principle to a metaphysical doctrine. Descartes' certainty concerning his existence as a thinking being is just another interpretation, neither necessary nor essential to who we are as persons, because beyond this *res cogitans* lies the unconscious. Like Hume, he claims that personal pronouns such as "I" cannot provide more than an illusory nominal unity standing for complex ongoing processes. He dismisses Schopenhauer's justification of metaphysical necessity as a dogmatic psychological explanation. Nietzsche opposes all this, saying that the self is composite. Thinking, feeling, and willing are mixed, intertwined, indistinguishable, inseparable, and bound by habit.

However, how does this composite self will? Giacoia explains that there is an aspect of power relation in every act of willing because it includes a command upon a person or thing. This command is an affect (*Affekt*) involving force or energy. In other words, Nietzsche includes a disposition to command and be obeyed in his concept of will. The self commands, and the Other obeys. The command is an exercise of personal power over other persons or things. For Nietzsche, freedom of the will means to have the power to command together with the belief or certainty that we shall be obeyed: "I am free" = "I want x and am sure that I shall be obeyed." Will to power is not just a wish linked to an expectation about interpersonal behavior. It is neither a positive self-determination nor a negative arbitrary impulsiveness. The conative component is bound to a propositional attitude (belief) about the world and society. The I-consciousness results from an affect that issues commands based on a belief in our self-ownership and self-control. Within our composite self, we may also experience the asymmetric duality of the master-slave power relation. The I-consciousness simplifies a complex inner reality and generates a fictional illusion of the will's power to be obeyed. The commanding part pretends to be one with the serving parts of ourselves, and all enjoy acting in coordination.

Giacoia references aphorism §19, I, of *Beyond Good and Evil* to identify three main points:

a) All supposed mental faculties are reinterpreted as a multiplicity of power relations between forces that inseparably influence thought, feeling, and willing;

b) The unity of consciousness is understood not as a foundational entity but rather as the result of its myriad psychical forces;

c) Instead of mind-body dualism, Nietzsche proposed a concept of the body as a multi-souled social structure in which the psyche is a subsystem of the body.

Somewhat ironically, Nietzsche renews Plato's analogy between the psyche and the *polis* (city-state). He compares consciousness to a governing elite that takes credit for what the workers accomplish but ignores how they did it. In Nietzsche's composite self, all parts are constantly thinking, feeling, and willing, regardless of whether they command or obey. On this basis, morality emerges as a doctrine of power relations under which life may flourish or not. Giacoia says this concludes the negative section of Nietzsche's project.

Section IV

To conclude his reconstruction of Nietzsche as a psychologist, Giacoia brings fundamental issues of the *Genealogy of Morals* into relation with Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, particularly on the psychodynamics of *ressentiment*. He explains that the first step is to remind ourselves of the difference in justification between the two asymmetric moral systems Nietzsche famously described. The master morality is self-sufficient and says yes to its composite self with all its

contradictions. In contrast, slave morality is dependent and says no to a superior or dominating Other, lending it more of a hostile and reactive character. For masters, negativity arises as an afterthought akin to an aesthetic dislike. It does not involve a moral condemnation but only implies a lower estimation from a vertical perspective of superiority. Viewing things from above creates a pathos of distance. When a master regards something as bad, he means to say that it is low, vulgar, dirty, or base but not evil in the slave's sense.

After having swept aside any possible claim Christian morality could make for its metaphysical necessity, Nietzsche wanted to reinterpret it from the new psychodynamic perspective he was pioneering. It is at this point that his positive contribution comes into play. As we saw earlier, Nietzsche wanted to develop a theory of psychological functioning that would be, if not reducible to physiology, at least grounded in it. Self-consciousness could not be treated anymore as a primary unified phenomenon. In its place, he proposed a composite self that was largely unconscious. Inspired by Boscovich, Nietzsche proceeded analytically and speculatively, elaborating a theory of psychical force discharge. Giacoia references Brusotti (1992), who distinguishes between two types of active discharge and one type of reactive discharge.

It is essential to be clear that the purpose of Nietzsche's psychical force discharge theory was to redescribe what we usually understand as morality, whether master or slave. Master morality would be explained as an attitude that originated from internal or endogenous stimuli, and that would be directed outwards towards the world and society. In Jung's terms, given its inner origin, it would be extraverted but also authentic. Brusotti distinguishes between two kinds of authentic extraversion in master morality. In the first, the endogenous impulse is expelled outward as in an explosion. This is typical of what we can call original behavior, in the sense that it is not just reactive as in the slave's case. The second kind of authentic activity is how Nietzsche dealt with the possibility that masters may have to react to some external stimulus. However, Brusotti says that even in such a situation, the master will override the external stimulus by his internal processing from endogenous stimuli. A master will avoid *ressentiment* because even if he needs to consider a situation that requires revenge, he will digest it and discharge his anger proportionately and immediately.

In contrast, the slave's psychodynamics reacts to exogenous stimuli and is locked within a dialectical vicious circle of negative internalization of weakness, hate, revenge, aggression, pain, and suffering. Giacoia explains that *ressentiment* is not just a mechanical reaction like the reflex arc. *Ressentiment* has a purpose (or teleonomic function) to reduce pain and suffering, much like, for Marx, religion was the opiate of the oppressed masses. Giacoia distinguishes four steps in how *ressentiment* works as a process:

a) it elaborates on an external, painful stimulus;

b) it directs a hateful discharge toward an external source;

c) it reduces the consciousness of pain;

d) it opens itself to new negative experiences.

The slave or resentful type suffers from obstructed extraversion, nurses wounds, becomes sentimental and is unable to direct pain and suffering outside, as in catharsis. The primary function of *ressentiment* is anesthesia or relief; its secondary function is to search for a culprit to discharge hatred towards it as a reaction to suffering. Slaves cannot forgive or forget. Paradoxically, they compound guilt with the pain they are already feeling to reduce their overall suffering.

Giacoia warns against interpreting the master-slave distinction as a socio-historical category. They are like Jungian psychological types. Empirically, they present themselves mixed in reality, in society, or even within a single individual. In any society, we may see both master and slave types interacting, constituting no absolute opposition. Neither do the master-slave categories refer to specific historical individuals. However, Giacoia notes that most modern individuals belong to the slave type because they are weak. This modern weakness is reflected in science (in concepts of reaction and adaptation); in philosophy (Kant's pure reason, cryptotheology, intellectualism); in morals and politics (altruism, socialism, anarchism, communism); and in health (people handicapped by excess, deformed by hypertrophy of certain parts, as F. Schiller had observed).

To conclude, Giacoia shows how Nietzsche's and Dostoevsky's views converge. Both agreed that the over-refinement of modern consciousness, the loss of spontaneity, and the constant search for rational explanations for behavior were symptoms of a disease. In *Notes from the Underground*, the main character exemplifies the psychodynamics of self-feeding *ressentiment* that he only overcomes by first renouncing his revenge and then accidentally reasserting himself, thus recovering his hurt self-esteem and achieving his goal. Dostoevsky's lesson, translated into Nietzsche's psychodynamic theory, is that even a brief suspension of the psychical block that prevents the resentful type from emitting an externally directed affective discharge is enough to approximate a nobler attitude of the master's type.

Nietzsche as a (re)source for autistics in the world today

From an Autistic Alexander Technique perspective, what matters is not whether Nietzsche was autistic but to identify his positive contribution to the autistic quality of life for people around the world. Besides being a master of German prose and poetry, as a philosopher, he developed skeptical arguments to disprove the necessity of dualistic metaphysics and modern epistemology. As a psychologist, he explored the possibility of explaining a wide range of phenomena utilizing unconscious psychical forces and their discharge mechanisms.

However, for autistics to benefit from Nietzsche's philosophy and psychology, it is important to first address the challenges that will be perceived as unfavorable because that is where the Alexander Technique is particularly beneficial for reducing stress, dysfunctional tension, and general unease.

It is scientifically well established that autistic thinking is dichotomic (black or white), following the logical law of excluded middle. Ambiguities and gray zones are uncomfortable. The same applies to metaphors, analogies, and similes because autistic thinking is primarily literal. Autistic alexithymia makes it challenging to respond emotionally to Nietzsche's rants and aphorisms that are ironic, provocative, or oblique. For this reason, not only Nietzsche's poetry but also his prose can be challenging, even if it becomes of special interest to an autistic reader. His insistence on abolishing any stable structure is starkly opposed to autistics' well-known cognitive rigidity and need for reliable structure. To make matters worse, Nietzsche was neither humanitarian nor empathic. There is no indication that he would care at all about autistics except as a reason to discredit them for being in some way weaker than average and for not being able to emit properly regulated outward psychical discharges.

The psychodynamic theory of psychical discharges reconstructed by Brusotti and Giacoia deserves closer examination from an autistic perspective. The main difficulty I see is that Nietzsche seems to have assumed that masters could constitute an individual self without needing an Other to interact with as if they were windowless monads. This dialectical relation between the self and the Other was acknowledged in speculative philosophy by Fichte and Hegel but is also generally recognized in empirical psychology (Piaget) and social science (G. H. Mead). The master's psychodynamics is driven mainly by endogenous stimuli. If the Other requires some reaction, it will be processed mainly based on internal stimuli. In other words, for the master, the Other is seldom more than a secondary trigger, which makes him at least externally similar to a narcissist.

Concerning the negation of the Other, which would be a slave's trait, Nietzsche does not seem to consider that self-righteous masters also say no to whom they oppress and treat as inferior. Conversely, the slave, by saying no to the master, is saying yes to him- or herself. This dialectic is expected in any power struggle, even at the geopolitical level. The master-slave terminology may be too emotionally laden and should be substituted by the more precise technical terms used by Brusotti and Giacoia.

Since life for autistics is marked by suffering, it is indeed better, as Nietzsche suggests, to avoid the psychodynamics of the resentful type and to seek self-empowerment of the master or overman type. An unconditional affirmation of life, or at least a reverence for it, as Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, can be helpful. However, for this self-empowerment to

work, Nietzsche's rejection of moralism and mind-body dualism is also necessary. Autistics suffer from internalized ableism and mind-body disassociation. A self-caring lifestyle requires that we forgive ourselves for not being able to perform as neurotypical professionals at total capacity.

Reverence for life often requires not judging another being's right to live. According to medical ethics, healthcare workers must do everything in their power to assist their patients, regardless of their criminal record. Amoralism is non-judgmental. It is also necessary in several other fields, such as the sciences and the arts. As we saw in Giacoia's reconstruction, Nietzsche outspokenly opposed moralism in his new psychology. However, amoralism should not be confused with immorality or what exoterically goes by the name of Satanism.

Amoralism is based on a higher moral value. In science, the higher value is intersubjectively controlled truth and objectivity. In the arts, beauty, and meaning, as opposed to reckless pseudoscientific experimentation and political propaganda. Nietzsche pointed to the familiar paradox that while conventional morality is often needed to regulate societies for the well-being of the majority, it may not be conducive to human advancement because it tends to hinder discovery and invention that may, in turn, benefit all. Creativity is a divine impulse that will consistently reappear no matter what we do. As Rudolf Steiner (1978) warned, the challenge is to avoid the double threat of Ahriman, who represents the oligarchic power of capitalistic materialism, and Lucifer, who represents the forces of spiritual and religious manipulation.

From an esoteric Christian perspective, Nietzsche's Anti-Christ(ian) is sometimes welcomed as an indictment of decadent tendencies in exoteric Christianity. On the exoteric side, Christian Zionists have appropriated Nietzsche to justify the ethnic cleansing of Palestine to prepare for the return of their Messiah. In the current world order, however, it is not clear that Nietzsche would have endorsed the genocide of the Palestinian population, for example, just because it would be the "right" of the mightier Anglo-Zionist elite. Regardless of what the facts on the ground actually are, on a purely conceptual or philosophical level, Nietzsche would not have approved of revenge; state terrorism; disproportionate retaliation; collective punishment; indiscriminate murder of women and children; intentional destruction of the environment and infrastructure; the targeted assassination of journalists, healthcare workers, and intellectuals; bombing civilians, hospitals, universities, and diplomatic buildings, among other war crimes that include their coverup and denial by complicit media, that in turn misinform and gaslight the world public.

On the one hand, as an autistic person with empathy for humanity and painfully aware of my limitations, I prefer to believe that Nietzsche would have stood up for the evolutionary tendencies still available to us as of 2024. However,

he predicted a future of unprecedented wars. Much depends on how we construe Nietzsche's view of great politics and what a "good European" would mean.

Subsequent history has shown us the need to develop institutions such as The International Court of Justice (ICJ) to adjudicate disputes between nations and The International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute war criminals. More often than not, these individuals have developed severe psychopathic conditions. They treat power as an end in itself that justifies any means, including the annihilation of humanity as a whole in a global nuclear war. Their insanity goes beyond Nietzsche's mental illness because their will to power is ultimately self-destructive for all. It is an extreme attachment to power that nihilistically destroys anything that resists its will. It dehumanizes the Other while presuming to be specially enlightened. It combines the worst of Lucifer and Ahriman in Steiner's terms. In response to this growing chaos, oppression, and exploitation, several countries formed the BRICS, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Hopefully, BRICS+ will reform the international order and offer a rational and humane alternative to the genocidal "great politics" and nuclear brinkmanship of pseudo-Nietzschean fanatics.

Final Remarks

Nietzsche never mentions autism directly, and his writings demand a lot of effort from autistics because of their subtle irony and symbolism. However, as I have shown, he was a robust, skeptical philosopher and a pioneer of depth psychology. His critique of conventional morality is helpful because it challenges neurotypical standards that cause internalized ableism, which is so harmful to autistics. Like Nietzsche, F. M. Alexander advocated psychophysical integration, creative exploration, and self-acceptance without moral judgment. Autistic Alexander Technique (AAT) requires making adjustments to the standard hands-on (AT 1.0) technique suggested by Caitlin G. Freeman, and it can be enhanced by Morales' Primal Alexander™ and Roig-Francolí's The Art of Freedom® Method use of hands-off ConstructiveThinking™ (AT 2.0). However, these advances outstrip the boundaries of academic disciplines such as philosophy and psychology because they combine theory and practice, scientific research, and patients' self-care. Ultimately, all of this vindicates Nietzsche's critique of the lack of psychological reflexivity in philosophy, the compartmentalization of knowledge, and its separation from the meaning we generate to transform our lives creatively.

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