

# Reading Nehamas's Nietzsche: An Overview of the Project of Self-Fashioning

Filip Čukljević

**Abstract:** In this article I shall investigate Alexander Nehamas's classic interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche in relation to the idea of self-fashioning. My aim is to dispel certain misconceptions about Nehamas's Nietzsche and to explore what his vision of life actually involves. First, I shall expose some basic presuppositions about self-fashioning, that have to do with the nature of the self. Then I shall examine the concept of style, which is related to the concept of the self, and what it means to give style to oneself. This endeavour will further expand on the prominently literary model of life espoused by Nehamas's Nietzsche. We will see that Nietzsche's (in)famous idea of the eternal return plays a pivotal role within this framework. Afterwards, it will be argued that realizing the idea of self-fashioning is a pluralistic affair, unique to each person. Subsequently, the temporal structure of self-fashioning will be addressed in greater detail, by focusing on two aspects: coming to terms with the past and being open to the future. Finally, the processual nature of this project will be further revealed with the analysis of its slogan 'become who you are.'

**Keywords:** Friedrich Nietzsche, Alexander Nehamas, self-fashioning, self, style, eternal return.

## 1. The Presuppositions of Self-Fashioning

In his classic *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* Nehamas provides an influential interpretation of Nietzsche which centers on two main themes: his perspectivism and aestheticism. According to the former, all knowledge-claims (including Nietzsche's own) are perspectival and depend on the given form of life, its needs, interests, and values. In other words, all views are interpretations – not passive reflections of neutral facts – and other interpretations are always possible, although this does not mean that they are all equally good (Nehamas 1985, 1, 3, 5, 6, 42, 72, 81, 105, 127, 198). The latter expresses Nietzsche's outlook on the self and the world at large through the artistic lens, more precisely as if they were literary texts (Nehamas 1985, 3, 39, 165). Aestheticism, according to Nehamas, motivates both perspectivism and, jointly with it, Nietzsche's presentation of his philosophical views through the voice of his specific literary character, which is Nietzsche himself as he appears in his writings (Nehamas 1985, 3-4, 137). I shall

focus primarily on aestheticism, particularly as it concerns the nature of the self and especially the idea of self-fashioning.<sup>1</sup>

The first thing that might come to mind when one thinks about the idea of self-fashioning is that it sounds paradoxical – it seems implausible within the Nietzschean worldview. Does Nietzsche not hold that the idea of the self, the subject, is an illusion, an ill-conceived idea, obtained from the way our language functions – with the word ‘I’ apparently denoting something substantial – and also the idea from which we have derived the dubious idea of substance, being (see *TI*, III, 52; *WP*, 473, 485; Nehamas 1985, 85, 171)<sup>2</sup> And if ‘the self’ does not actually exist, then what does one have to fashion or create (Nehamas 1985, 172, 176-177)?

Clearly Nietzsche is of the opinion that the self as an already unified entity, unified in itself, cannot be presupposed (see *BGE*, 12; *WP*, 490, 561; Nehamas 1985, 177-178). Yet, as Nehamas points out, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra maintains that: “And all my creating and striving amounts to this, that I create and piece together into one, what is now fragment and riddle and grisly accident [human beings]” (*Z*, II, 20, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 178). How are we to understand these two strands of Nietzsche’s thought in order to make them compatible with each other?

Nehamas provides us with the answer: the unified self cannot be presupposed as a given, but it can be achieved, at least in theory. According to Nietzsche, human beings are made up of various ‘drives’ which interact with each other, often struggling among themselves. There is nothing above this level of drives that keeps them in check, decides upon which drives to act upon and which to curb, thereby providing some kind of pre-established unity (see Nehamas 1985, 177; *BGE*, 12; *WP*, 490). The only possible unity is the one that can be achieved when all drives become organized enough to be directed towards a common end (Nehamas 1985, 177-178). Only then can one achieve selfhood.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrases such as ‘self-fashioning,’ ‘life as literature,’ ‘life as a work of art,’ ‘self-creation,’ ‘becoming who one is,’ and their variations are used by Nehamas as synonyms. I shall follow him in this practice, although I shall primarily use the term ‘self-fashioning.’ All of these terms will be shown to be somewhat lacking, but I believe the previous one to be the least so. The idea to which these terms refer to expresses a certain ethics – the so called ‘*aesthetics of existence*’ – and is related to other historic traditions, as noted by Marinus Schoeman (Schoeman 2008, 437).

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche’s texts will be cited by section number using the standard English-language acronyms: *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT); *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (PTG); *Untimely Meditations* (UM); *Daybreak* (D); *The Gay Science* (GS); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z); *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE); *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM); *The Case of Wagner* (CW); *The Twilight of the Idols* (TI); *The Antichrist* (A); *Ecce Homo* (EH); *The Will to Power* (WP); *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA).

<sup>3</sup> Nehamas notes that the idea of this derivation is inconsistent with what Nietzsche says elsewhere, which is that the derivation goes in the other direction, or at least that the ideas of the subject and the object developed simultaneously. Also, the idea of the substantial self is an essential presupposition for attributing freedom of choice to human beings, which was invented – according to Nietzsche – in order to hold us responsible, hence punishable (Nehamas 1985, 85-86; *GM*, I, 13; II, 21-22).

But if there is no already unified self, how can we even talk of 'us' having conflicting drives that could be organized in a more coherent, unified way? Does this talk not presuppose that we are already unified to certain extent, which allows us to discern one person with its drives from another? According to Nehamas's Nietzsche, this minimal required unity is provided by the (relative but sufficient) unity of the body, with its basic bodily needs and interests being mostly in agreement with each other. The body acts as a sort of battleground for various mental contents, actions, characteristics, and habits that fight for the provisional position of the body's commander, its manifestation being the ability to say 'I' – at least for a certain time. Although it seems that this term has a constant referent when uttered by the same body, it actually refers to the current presiding drive (Nehamas 1985, 180-182).

If one does not begin as a self but rather has to achieve that status, then one's character – a particular set of drives and its relations that constitute a person – is not set in stone but changeable. Moreover, it must not only be changeable, but also capable of being changed at least in part by ourselves and not just by some external factors, e.g. various socio-historical forces. Otherwise, it could not count as an achievement but rather as something that simply happens – or does not happen – to us (see Pippin 2015, 152).

Nietzsche often insists that these conditions are indeed met. He points out that human beings are composed of numerous drives that they can cultivate in different ways (see *D*, 560; *GM*, III, 13). We can develop some, while neglecting others; we may minimize the grip some of these drives have on us, or redirect them in a specific manner. By this "plastic power" to fashion oneself Nietzsche means "the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds" (*UM*, II, 1). Thus one tries to keep one's life from resembling "a mindless act of chance" (*UM*, III, 1). In exerting this power one gives form to oneself (Schoeman 2008, 435).

Nietzsche encourages us to approach this activity with a boldness and willingness to take risks (see *UM*, III, 1). Having in mind that Nietzsche often proposes the artist as the paradigmatic case of a human being wielding this shaping power, such encouragement is only to be expected. Great art is rarely, if ever, created without an audacity and will to experiment.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche gives us a glimpse into his own self-fashioning, or at least into how he perceived it. He claims that one must be open to what one might become, without knowing in advance what exactly that might be. One should not be discouraged by past mistakes or infelicities, for even these are significant if one knows how to integrate them into the larger whole of one's life (*EH*, II, 9).

Moreover, in this section Nietzsche strongly suggests that the process of self-fashioning is not primarily conscious, if so at all, which casts doubts on one of this process's major presuppositions. Because it requires a separate analysis, I

shall not dwell deeper into the question of the extent to which self-fashioning is (un)conscious, although it is a prominent one. If it turns out that self-fashioning is primarily, or entirely, unconscious, then it becomes contentious to what extent is self-fashioning up to us (Pippin 2015, 152), as Nietzsche assumes elsewhere. Whatever the answer, this emphasis on the unconscious dimension of self-fashioning is in accordance with the fact that its paradigm is artistic activity, which is often regarded as unconscious to a significant extent.

## 2. Giving Style to Oneself

The project of self-fashioning presupposes a certain conception of the self. Nehamas states that the self is not something solid and persistent. One does not always already have a self. Selfhood is to be achieved – although most often one does not achieve it. A person does not consist of some insulated essential core – selfhood as traditionally conceived – but of everything they think, experience, and do. In most people, their thoughts, experiences, and actions are connected accidentally, lacking a unifying principle of organization. However, in some cases they are connected in a way that indicates the presence of a style. And where there is a style, there is a self (Nehamas 1985, 7, 17).<sup>4</sup>

Nehamas's Nietzsche holds that an exceptional self is composed of many different potent and clashing inclinations that are successfully managed and integrated (Nehamas 1985, 7, 187-188; *WP*, 966; *EH*, II, 9). A self is more admirable the richer it is with content and tension, and if it maintains this abundance with a distinct style. The plurality of powerful and conflicting tendencies is of critical importance for an exceptional self, because the mere coherence in one's tendencies can also be the result of one's frailty, conventionality, and shallowness (Nehamas 1985, 7). A person who has just a few strong propensities, not distinctly at odds with each other, could be said to have achieved a certain level of selfhood, but this would not be a particularly exceptional self.<sup>5</sup> Thus Richard Schacht's claim that according to Nehamas it is enough to create a "coherent whole" out of one's life in order to be a true self is specious (Schacht 1992, 274-275, 280).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> According to Nehamas, this denial of the existence of the substantial self above one's thoughts, actions, and experiences is an instance of Nietzsche's overall rejection of the existence of the thing-in-itself, understood as an underlying thing that holds together all of its apparent properties (Nehamas 1985, 154-155).

<sup>5</sup> Schoeman correctly points out that the self does not experience tension only within itself, but also between itself and the others – the other selves as well as the socio-historical setting in which it is situated (Schoeman 2008, 434).

<sup>6</sup> Robert B. Pippin has misgivings similar to Schacht's (Pippin 2015, 145-147). Nehamas is partly to be blamed for these doubts. He claims that the project of self-fashioning entails "a radical formalism" – meaning that the organizational coherence of one's life is what matters, not the intrinsic characteristics of its parts – and that Nietzsche was aware of this (Nehamas 1985, 39, 136; see *WP*, 818). In my opinion, Nehamas does not argue in a sufficiently assertive manner that the project of self-fashioning, besides this 'coherential' aspect on which he mostly focuses,

What exactly does it mean to give style to oneself? It is hard, if not impossible to provide a detailed answer to this question, given that style is something idiosyncratic to a genuine self, and thus differs between the various selves (Nehamas 1985, 225-226, 228-230). Nietzsche states that the function of a style is "to *communicate* a state, an inner tension of pathos, with signs [...]. Good style *in itself* – this is *pure stupidity* [...]" (EH, III, 4). Although what makes a good style in one case may differ from what makes a good style in another, in the following famous passage Nietzsche gives to my mind the best description of what the process of giving style to oneself might generally be like:

*One thing is needful.* – To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and employed for distant views – it is supposed to beckon towards the remote and immense. In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small – whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it's enough that it was one taste! (GS, 290, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 185; see BGE, 116)<sup>7</sup>

For Nehamas, Nietzsche's attempt to give the question of style preeminence in his thinking by transposing it from the domain of the arts to that of everyday life is a manifestation of Nietzsche's aestheticism: Nietzsche looks at the world and its components through the prism offered by artistic – or, more precisely, literary – models, and assesses persons and their actions accordingly (Nehamas 1985, 39).<sup>8</sup>

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has a 'quantitative' aspect (the more urges one has the better), as well as a 'dynamic' one (the more powerful and conflicting with each other these urges are the better). Simon May also discerns these aspects (May 2009, 93-94).

<sup>7</sup> David Owen offers a more exhaustive and insightful analysis of this passage (Owen 2013, 78-80).

<sup>8</sup> The main aim of this article is not to examine to what extent Nehamas's Nietzsche corresponds to the actual Nietzsche, but to overview and appreciate Nehamas's Nietzsche in his own right. Nevertheless, it ought to be remarked that Mark Tomlinson notes that Nehamas's interpretation sometimes seems to impose Nehamas's own views onto Nietzsche and thus to smooth over the complexity (and potential contradictions) of Nietzsche's thought (Tomlinson 2011, 208-209). Moreover, Brian Leiter holds that the aestheticism that Nehamas ascribes to Nietzsche goes against the naturalism that Leiter ascribes to Nietzsche (Leiter 1992, 276-280). However, relations between aestheticist and naturalist elements in Nietzsche's writings – and both can be found there – demand a separate enquiry. Still, as Tomlinson suggests, a rigid reliance on the texts might not be the best way to read a philosopher like Nietzsche – a bolder, more daring and ambitious approach, such as Nehamas's, might be more fecund (Tomlinson 2011, 208-209).

### 3. The Literary Model of Life

One of Nehamas's major claims is that Nietzsche views the ideal person as the ideal literary character, and subsequently construes the ideal life as the ideal story (Nehamas 1985, 165). This connects and develops two previously explored trains of thought: Nietzsche's recurrent insistence on fashioning one's life as a work of art and his view of the self as an achievement.

Nietzsche never explicitly states that the model for the ideal person should be the literary character (see Tomlinson 2011, 208-209; Pippin 2015, 142). Furthermore, I am not sure whether he mentions literature, much less the novel when he discusses the artistic aspects of the life worth living<sup>9</sup> – he mentions theatre (see *GS*, 78) and poetry (see *BT*, 33; *GS*, 299, 301), which might be said to come closest. Nietzsche mostly refers to the arts in general. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to imagine why Nehamas identifies literature, more precisely the novel, as the art form which is best suited for demonstrating what it means to fashion oneself as a work of art. The sheer (potential) complexity and the shape our lives take – being made up of various thoughts, memories, experiences, encounters, events, and many more – most easily fits in a narrative structure which, for its part, can best be articulated in great novels such as Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.<sup>10</sup> This novel is the chief example Nehamas provides for Nietzsche's idea of self-fashioning (see Nehamas 1985, 167, 168, 188).

Nehamas believes that literary characters are nothing more than what is said of them in the narratives in which they take part (Nehamas 1985, 165). This fits well with his peculiar view of the self, as it provides a familiar example for an idea that may seem strange at first. Furthermore, Nehamas argues that – in the ideal case scenario at least – changing just one detail concerning a literary character harms both that character and the story of which it is a part. This brings back the notion of style, which should act as the organizing principle of the character's (literary or real) life. The totality of a life's narrative should be so well organized, its parts connected in such a way and inwrought with a single style, that the slightest alteration in its details would dispense with the whole altogether (Nehamas 1985, 165, 194).

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<sup>9</sup> Only Nietzsche's claim that "the higher human being" is the "ongoing author of life" (*GS*, 301) comes to mind.

<sup>10</sup> Tomlinson notes that the type of the literary character that Nehamas considers as the model for the ideal person is not omnipresent in novel, nor in literature in general. It is a type of character "in which growth, development, and change are privileged;" the other types that can be found in literature are not taken into account (Tomlinson 2011, 203). Although Nehamas should have acknowledged this fact, I do not think that it represents a major flaw of his reading of Nietzsche. As stated above, it seems that the (potential) complexity and the content of one's life can best be captured in novels such as Proust's – that is, "the nineteenth-century realist novel and some early versions of the modernist novel," as Pippin observes (Pippin 2015, 142) – and the vehicles for this are the characters of the specific sort which Tomlinson identifies.

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One consequence of this position – which Nehamas is well aware of – is that the intrinsic character of an action is not what is truly important; what matters is how an action fits in with other actions and particularities of one's life. In other words, the im(morality) of one's actions is not particularly important when appreciating a literary character – there are great literary characters who are not morally commendable. If a person is to imagine and fashion themselves as a literary character, their (im)morality would not necessarily play a significant role (Nehamas 1985, 165-166, 193-194).

Because Nehamas often mentions Proust's novel as the best example of what having a literary model for one's life might mean, it is instructive to cite one such passage at length, especially considering that here we are introduced to yet another (in)famous idea of Nietzsche which Nehamas deploys in order to further explore Nietzsche's vision of self-fashioning – the idea of the eternal return:

In thinking of his [Nietzsche's] ideal life on the model of a story, we would do well to think of it in the specific terms supplied by Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. In this fictional autobiography the narrator relates in enormous, painstaking detail all the silly, insignificant, pointless, accidental, sometimes horrible things he did in his rambling efforts to become an author. He writes about the time he wasted, the acquaintances he made, the views and values he accepted at different times, his changes of heart and mind, his friendships, the ways in which he treated his family, his lovers, and his servants, his attempts to enter society, the disjointed and often base motives out of which he acted, and much else besides. Yet it is just these unconnected, chance events that somehow finally enable him to become an author, to see them after all as parts of a unified pattern, the result of which is his determination to begin at last his first book. This book, he tells us, will relate in detail all the silly, insignificant, pointless, accidental, sometimes horrible things he did in his rambling efforts to become an author. It will concern the time he wasted, the acquaintances he made, the views and values he accepted at different times, his changes of heart and mind, his friendships, the ways in which he treated his family, his lovers, and his servants, his attempts to enter society, the disjointed and often base motives out of which he acted, and much else besides. It will also show how these unconnected chance events somehow finally enabled him to become an author, to see them after all as parts of a unified pattern, the result of which is his determination at last to begin his first book, which will relate all the pointless, accidental... – a book he has not yet begun to write but which his readers have just finished reading (Nehamas 1985, 167-168).

Leiter argues that Proust's narrator cannot be the proper model for self-fashioning as envisioned by Nehamas's Nietzsche. He says that when we consider Nietzsche's praise of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Nietzsche's paragon of self-fashioning – as Nehamas himself observes – self-fashioning seems to consist in a particular way of living rather than fashioning oneself through writing. In Goethe's case, this 'practical' self-fashioning preceded and led to him creating great

artworks, not the other way around, as Leiter claims to be the case with Proust's narrator (Leiter 1992, 289; see *TI*, IX, 49-50).<sup>11</sup>

Leiter is right to point out that there are aspects of Proust's narrator's self-fashioning that are not and need not be present in other cases of self-fashioning – such as the significance of writing – as well as that there are important aspects of other cases of self-fashioning that are not visible in Proust's narrator's self-fashioning – such as the more 'practical' type of behaviour one engages in. Still, it is impossible to come up with a perfect example of the self-fashioning as envisaged by Nehamas's Nietzsche because it varies from person to person, with the formal characteristic being the only common denominator. This characteristic – incorporating all of one's life content (the more multifarious and intense the better) into a single coherent narrative that shows how it all led to one being the person one is today and continuing to live according to this narrative – belongs to Proust's narrator, as Nehamas indicates in the passage cited above. One of the defining marks of the life of Proust's narrator, if not the defining one, is his struggle to become an author. Eventually, after all kinds of considerable failures, misfortunes, and chance events, both artistic and personal, he grasps them all as parts of the larger whole, meaning that all of them had led him to become an author and start writing his first book. Becoming an author is of fundamental importance for Proust's narrator – it is only fitting that his self-fashioning is so closely connected to writing. After all, being an author – committing oneself to writing – is a type of behaviour and a way of living, contrary to what Leiter claims.

There are two further reasons as to why Nehamas puts forward Proust's narrator as an exemplar of what it might mean to fashion oneself. First, there is a deeper analogy between Proust's narrator's self-fashioning and that of Nietzsche, as Nehamas understands it; for both writing and creating a specific literary work are essential for their self-fashioning (see Nehamas 1985, 8, 29, 41, 98, 114, 188, 196, 231, 233). Second, at the very end of Proust's novel his narrator makes the decision to start writing a book about how all the events of his life had led him to become an author. The book in question is *Remembrance of Things Past*, which the reader has just finished. This circular narrative structure of Proust's novel, which invites us to read it over and over again with no real end to this process, is a fitting illustration of the idea of the eternal return (Nehamas 1985, 168).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> As Pippin shows, Nehamas himself sometimes writes in a way so as to suggest that there is some kind of 'literary' self-fashioning, exemplified in Nietzsche, which does not make a difference to one's real character. Pippin correctly indicates that this is not consistent with Nehamas's general view (Pippin 2015, 153-154).

<sup>12</sup> Pippin is troubled by this (potential) infinity of the process of self-fashioning. He objects to the idea of being an author of one's life in the following way: the process of creating a unified narrative out of one's life is also a part of one's life and will require to be incorporated into that narrative, while this incorporation itself will also need to be incorporated, and so on ad infinitum (see Pippin 2009, 78-79; Pippin 2015, 144, 152-153). Nehamas is aware of this apparent conundrum, although he is not entirely clear on how he deflates it (Nehamas 1985, 198-199). What Nehamas should have said more clearly, I believe, is that this seemingly



#### 4. The Eternal Return

According to Nehamas, the idea of the eternal return does not provide some exotic metaphysics or cosmology, as Nietzsche is sometimes interpreted to be doing. This concept is not so much about the universe as it is about the self (Nehamas 1985, 150). More precisely, it presents us with a psychological test of the utmost aesthetic and existential significance.

Nehamas points out that Nietzsche believes that a person's life has no value in itself. It gains value only insofar as that person assigns it value – that is, they create their life's value rather than discover it (Nehamas 1985, 135; Nehamas 1996a, 232).<sup>13</sup>

How does one assign value to one's life? Nehamas identifies two steps. First, one must accept that one's life will necessarily involve a certain amount of pain and suffering, blunders and misfortunes, but that these are neither intrinsically bad or good (Nehamas 1985, 136, 228-230). The mere fact that these 'negative' aspects exist does not preclude one from creating a meaningful whole out of the totality of one's life, thus exploiting and in a sense justifying even the unpleasant parts of it. Like Nehamas says: "[...] everything in the world, like everything art touches, can become part of a great work" (Nehamas 1996a, 245).

Second, one must create a life that is so well-fashioned and unified that one would be willing to live it again, exactly as it is, with all of its ups and downs. If one would be willing to live one's life again under these conditions, then one would be unwilling to exchange one's life for any other conceivable life – that is, if one could even conceive of living a life different than one's very own. As Nehamas argues, if a person could somehow relive their life it would have to be exactly the same as it was before – being that a person is constituted by the totality of their actions, thoughts, and experiences, if anything were different it would not be their life anymore, but someone else's (Nehamas 1985, 154-157).

This is what the concept of the eternal return implies.<sup>14</sup> Passing this test means that one has created a veritable work of art out of oneself, with each part so inextricably connected to every other part and the whole that even the most

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bewildering feature is completely in harmony with the fact that self-fashioning has a processual, open structure without an inherent closure. After all, Nehamas not only ascribes this view to Nietzsche, but also claims that the latter celebrates it (Nehamas 1985, 175-176).

<sup>13</sup> Nehamas claims that in his earlier writings Nietzsche held that life – understood as a force beyond individual lives – had an intrinsic positive value, while in his later writings he had a more neutral view expressed above (Nehamas 1985, 134-135). Nehamas also draws our attention to the difference in how Nietzsche understood giving one's life a meaning in his early and mature periods. The view presented above is from his mature period. In his early period Nietzsche held that any attempt to give meaning to one's individual life would ultimately end in failure (Nehamas 2006, 63-64).

<sup>14</sup> Concerning Nietzsche's thought of the eternal return, locus classicus is *GS*, 341. Some other prominent places include *Z*, III, 2, III, 13, IV, 19; *BGE*, 56; 11[141], 11[163], 11[338] from Nietzsche's notebook M, III, 1, in *KSA*, volume 9.

minute alteration would ruin everything (Nehamas 1985, 136). Thus, the psychological test provided by the idea of the eternal return is of utmost aesthetic and existential importance, because it is both the criterion of whether one has successfully turned oneself into a work of art and of whether, in doing so, one has successfully provided one's life with value.

But does not it appear quite unrealistic to demand that every tiny detail of a person's life be so integrated with each other that they would not want to change anything, as Pippin wonders (Pippin 2009, 78)? Are there not some actions that just do not seem that important, if so at all, and that could be different? Nehamas is aware of these doubts. He points out that, while all of one's life's details are indeed equally necessary for one's identity, one does not and does not need to give them equal significance (Nehamas 1985, 184). If a person considers some parts of their life insignificant – and all lives must have these parts, otherwise nothing would be significant – then the question of how they fit in with the rest does not arise. What counts is how those parts of one's life that one regards as significant fit together<sup>15</sup> – what is significant varies among different persons and may change for the same person over time (Nehamas 1985, 157-158). This is true for both real and literary characters, as all narration is essentially selective, that is perspectival (see Nehamas 1985, 55-56, 160-161).

The ideal life and works of art share more than just the same structure, which consists in the harmonious relations between the parts themselves as well as between them and the whole they constitute. As Nietzsche writes: "We want to experience a work of art over and over again! We should fashion our life in this way, so that we have the same wish with each of its parts! This is the main idea!" (11[165] from Nietzsche's notebook M, III, 1, in *KSA*, volume 9). This statement explicitly combines the idea of the eternal return and the experience of great art. Just as one is, in the ideal case at least, willing to encounter a single great work of art again and again – or, more realistically, is inclined to return to it after a certain period of time (many people have at least one artwork that they hold special) – one should be willing to return to one's life, that is, relive it in its entirety.

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<sup>15</sup> This gives rise to the problem of self-deception. What if a person, purposefully or unbeknownst to them, ignores those parts of their life that they actually deem significant? Nehamas is aware of this problem, and according to him so is Nietzsche. His answer is twofold: first, self-fashioning is an endless process that requires persistent self-examination. Self-deception is a constant possibility, but so is its overcoming. Second, the concept of style is necessarily public. Therefore, when evaluating someone's character the final word will always belong to certain audience, which keeps one's alleged self-fashioning in check (Nehamas 1985, 162-164, 185-186, 251; see Owen 2013, 76-77). Pippin's suggestion that Nietzsche's criterion for evaluating self-fashioning is not grounded in the social context is thus unfounded (Pippin 2015, 148).

## 5. The Plurality of Styles

Exactly what kind of life should one live in order to pass the test contained in the idea of the eternal return? Do Nietzsche or Nehamas offer any insightful suggestions? Fundamentally, no. The idea of the eternal return is not primarily concerned with the content of one's life, but with its form. Regardless of how one chooses to fill the gap between the moment one is born and the moment one dies, what matters most is the overall shape that one's life takes. To reiterate, (Nehamas's) Nietzsche thinks that actions, like everything else, have no significance in and of themselves. They gain meaning when they are integrated into a whole and imbued with a single style that keeps everything together.

But could there be a single style fit for all the various lives? No, because in that case the very concept of style would lose sense – from what would we differentiate that single style? How would it count as a style at all (Nehamas 1985, 17)? Imagine some eccentric art historian proposing that there exists a single encompassing style throughout all the ages and regions – the apparent myriad of historic styles being merely an illusion. How could we identify such a singular style, if not against the background comprised of other styles? Hence, we can only speak of styles in plural.

As we have already seen, there is a close relationship between the concept of style and the concept of the self. Furthermore, the concept of the self is interwoven with that of the individual, as Nehamas's Nietzsche understands it. By becoming a self, one becomes an individual. How does one become an individual? If there was a singular instructive answer to this question, the term 'individual' would not have the meaning that it has (Nehamas 1985, 8, 225-226). Nehamas draws another comparison with the arts. No formula or set of rules can tell us what to do in order to produce a new genre in art or a great artwork. To achieve this, one needs to break at least some established rules and conventions, and there can be no instructions on how to do this. The same goes if one is to become an individual (Nehamas 1985, 225-226, 228-230; Nehamas 1998, 142-143). To see what a person can become, given all their abilities, desires, experiences, and so on, they must look beyond the horizon enclosed by the convention and conformity of the time and place they find themselves in (see *CW*, Preface).<sup>16</sup>

It may be said that the test provided by the idea of the eternal return serves as a kind of sieve, preventing all ways of living that do not possess the adequate form from being considered as worthy of pursuing. It is essentially a negative criterion (see Nehamas 1985, 8, 167). One is left to come up for oneself with the

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Conway emphasizes how hard it is to come to terms with and develop one's abilities, given the social limitations on what counts as permissible behaviour (Conway 1997, 54). On the other hand, John Richardson points out a more positive role for social context in this endeavour of self-fashioning – one builds one's individuality on the basis of what is 'common,' by making it one's own and giving it an idiosyncratic touch (Richardson 2015, 239-242). This proposition is in tune with Nehamas's claim that creation does not happen in a vacuum (Nehamas 1996a, 247; Nehamas 1996b, 51).

exact sort of life one would be willing to live over and over again – one may have some other criteria that would exclude certain other ways of life, as Nietzsche clearly had (A, 1-5; see Nehamas 1985, 167; Schoeman 2008, 435). The thought-experiment contained in the idea of the eternal return bestows us with the form of the ideal life, but we must each contribute our own content to it. As Zarathustra remarks: “‘This – it turns out – is *my* way – where is yours?’ – That is how I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ *The* way after all – it does not exist!” (Z, III, 11; see Nehamas 1985, 38, 158).

A natural consequence of this standpoint is that there is no sense in imposing one’s way of life upon others (Nehamas 1985, 34, 68, 70-71). We humans are incredibly complex and unique webs of thoughts, memories, desires, actions, affects, etc. – although our attempts to conform to societal norms, be them intentional or merely habitual, make us appear (or maybe even truly become) much more simple and common (see *UM*, III, 1).<sup>17</sup> Those who aspire to selfhood and individuality must draw from these resources, which are unique to each of us, in order to impose a singular stylistic order on this haphazard multitude (Nehamas 1985, 228). It is completely unreasonable to suppose that different people will have exactly the same life content, or to be so similar that it would allow for an identical style. While there may be, and probably always will be, numerous resemblances between different life stories, there will invariably be ample variations between that demand an idiosyncratic ideal way of life (Nehamas 1998, 143).

That being said, one should not be deceived into thinking that there is a single specific ideal way of life available to each of us if we try hard enough. Nehamas’s Nietzsche does not seem to believe that we are all capable, at least not to the same extent, of giving meaning to our lives in the aforementioned sense (Nehamas 1985, 224-225). A large number of human beings are probably bound to remain compounds of various competing drives and affects that they are,

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to make an explicit distinction between our ‘uniqueness’ and possible ‘individuality’ in the context of Nietzschean self-fashioning, as understood by Nehamas. The etymology of these words might be of help. The word ‘unique’ traces its origins from Latin word ‘unus,’ meaning ‘one.’ The word ‘individual’ is derived from Latin word ‘individuus,’ meaning ‘indivisible’ (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, Eleventh edition 2004). All persons are unique in a sense that each of us represents a multiplex network of thoughts, memories, desires, actions, affects, etc. which did not, does not, and never will have an exact copy – it is ‘one’ of its kind. Being unique in this sense is no achievement whatsoever, nothing which we could be proud of or praised for. Therefore, a popular saying that ‘we are all unique,’ while being true, is nothing to write home about (see Nehamas 2016, 202-205; Nehamas 1996a, 237). On the other hand, becoming an individual is an achievement obtained when this multiplex network – that each of us is – becomes organized as a single coherent unity, with its parts being necessarily connected to each other and to the whole they comprise, while maintaining and advancing the variety and force of its drives. This whole thus becomes an individual, that is ‘indivisible’ because of the interrelatedness of its parts. To sum up – we are all unique, but we are not all, if any, individuals.

unable to successfully mould this tumultuous plenitude into a coherent narrative unity to any significant extent.

In addition, those human beings who can find a style for their lives are not guaranteed to have a single style for the entirety of their lifetime. As time passes, life's content – one's experiences, thoughts, desires, habits, and the rest – can and probably will change significantly. The same is true of the social, historical, political, economic, and environmental background against which life occurs. As a result, in a new state of affairs, a certain way of life may cease to be optimal, if not downright possible. One could then adopt a new way of life (Nehamas 1985, 70-71, 228). Nehamas does not say whether this would count as some kind of evolution of a style, or rather as a disruption. Looking at how art styles change throughout history, there is no reason why it could not be either of these, depending on the circumstances.

Curiously, it seems that Nietzsche suggests in one passage that some people (himself, nonetheless) could have more than one style of shaping oneself at the same time (*EH*, III, 4). Theoretically speaking, this would be consistent with Nietzsche's perspectivism. The same phenomenon, in this case one's life, could be interpreted differently, both by different persons and by the same person. Nietzsche often encourages us to view things from different points of view (see *GM*, III, 12; Nehamas 1985, 50, 84). Why not apply this to one's life? Considered practically, however, it is not entirely clear how one person could fashion oneself in two or more distinct styles at the same time. Perhaps one would have to be Nietzsche, but it is an interesting prospect nonetheless.

Self-fashioning does not occur in a vacuum, but in the real world where all sorts of social, historical, political, biological, economic, and environmental factors affect it. Nehamas sometimes writes in a manner that may lead us to think that self-fashioning dictates that one should create an entirely new way of life, completely breaking off from at least some established social practices and thus somehow insulating oneself from one's social surrounding (see Nehamas 1998, 142). For example, he writes: "Nietzsche's self-fashioning [...] is an essentially individual project. It does not allow you to follow, in any straightforward sense, the example set by someone else; for instead of creating yourself you would then be imitating that other person. Individuality, however, is threatened not only if you imitate someone else but also [...] if others imitate you" (Nehamas 1998, 143). This should be understood in light of what has already been established – a particular individuality, like a certain style, cannot be shared by two or more people. One cannot simply copy someone's way of life without somehow compromising that style and the individuality related to it. In the worst-case scenario, if everyone were to adopt the same style it would cease to be a style at all – instead it would become a conventional way of conduct. Even if it does not come to this, each of us has a unique life's content and it would be inappropriate to try to impose one's personal style of life to someone else (Nehamas 1998, 142-143).

However, this does not mean that one's attempt at self-fashioning cannot influence, or be influenced by someone else's style. In fact, it is inevitable to be influenced by some already existing model. To return to the arts: the phenomenon of older styles influencing newer ones is the *sine qua non* of artistic production, responsible for countless genres and works of art, whether great or forgettable. Stylistic influence can manifest itself in a sort of imitation – but with a catch. Certain aspect(s) of an existing style might be artfully adapted to a different material under changed conditions and combined with other stylistic approaches, resulting in a new and distinct style. Why would not the same hold for self-fashioning? Nehamas is at times quite explicit: literary narratives do not emerge *ex nihilo*, absolutely original, but are necessarily influenced by previous similar endeavours (Nehamas 1996a, 247; Nehamas 1996b, 51). Furthermore, Nehamas argues that the best we can do is to allow ourselves to be influenced by the greatest narratives we can find (Nehamas 1996b, 51). To become an individual means to effectively employ the given resources – the facts of one's personal life, the socio-historical context in which one finds oneself, the models one looks up to, and so on – in order to create a different narrative that is both grounded in factors that precede us and over which one has no direct control, and that represents something irreducibly one's own.

Nehamas draws a parallel with the arts: both an individual and an artwork must not be too far removed from the norms that regulate the context in which they emerge in order to be acknowledged as someone, or something, with whom other persons could fruitfully engage with. However, they must also be sufficiently remote from these norms so as to demand further engagement and interpretation. A true individual reveals hitherto untapped prospects for living, which others could pursue and further stylize according to their own peculiarities (Nehamas 1996b, 51). If a person strays too far from the established norms they risk not being recognized as a genuine individual at all, the one worthy of admiration and emulation. Yet how far is too far? This cannot be told in advance and the reception may change over time, as many stylistic innovators might testify.

## **6. Coming to Terms with Necessity and the Past**

This focus on the artistic activity and experimentation does not mean that 'anything goes' when one fashions oneself. Far from it. Becoming who one is, as Nietzsche famously calls his vision of self-fashioning and which Nehamas accepts (see *GS*, 270, 335; Nehamas 1985, 65, 171, 174), is not an escape from oneself as one is currently. On the contrary: it is "no longer to be ashamed before oneself" (*GS*, 275; see Conway 1997, 68). In order to achieve this "we must become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world" (*GS*, 335). This is analogous to the experience of the artists. As Nietzsche claims: "Every artist knows how far removed this feeling of letting go is from his 'most natural' state, the free ordering, placing, disposing and shaping in the moment of 'inspiration' – he knows how strictly and subtly he obeys thousands of laws at this

very moment [...]” (*BGE*, 188, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 47; see *PTG*, 7; Nehamas 1985, 48, 61). The project of self-fashioning is thus sensitive to the fact that even in one's most creative moments one does not simply will something into existence, but is subject to forces largely unknown and beyond one's control (see Conway 1997, 68).

Self-fashioning is not an 'anything goes' affair in the voluntarist sense, nor is it in the way in which one invests oneself in this project. If we are to organize our drives in a way that allows us to become “human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (*GS*, 335), there must be “*obedience* in one direction for a long time” (*BGE*, 188). In other words, this project requires time, dedication, and sacrifice. It is no wonder then, as Nehamas points out, that it is in artists that Nietzsche finds the “*attained* 'freedom of the will'” (*TI*, V, 3, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 187; see Nehamas 1985, 195, 219). Nietzsche states that “[...] freedom is being understood here as freedom and facility in self-direction. Every artist will understand me [...]” (*WP*, 705, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 195).<sup>18</sup> As Nehamas claims, for Nietzsche freedom is not opposed to necessity, but consists in having all of one's dispositions jointly working towards a single course of action, with the contrast between the ability to choose otherwise and the sense of being compelled completely dissolving. Thus freedom, like selfhood, is not a given but something to be achieved, and is firmly connected to the achievement of selfhood (Nehamas 1985, 187, 253; see Pippin 2009, 76-77). Nietzsche attempts to reconcile necessity and freedom by showing that the latter presupposes the former on the basis of experience that the artists have while engaging in the creative act.

In his ruminations on the intimate relationship between freedom and necessity Nietzsche goes so far as to celebrate what he calls “a cheerful and trusting fatalism in the *belief* that only the individual is reprehensible [the individual details of one's life, not the individual human beings], that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole [...]” (*TI*, IX, 49; see Nehamas 1985, 174), which he attributes to Goethe, his prime example of what a human being dedicated to self-fashioning is capable of. According to Nietzsche, Goethe was the ultimate “Yes-sayer” (*GS*, 276) who “disciplined himself to wholeness” (*TI*, IX, 49) into which he tried to incorporate as much as possible, no matter how diverging his passions were – “he *created* himself” (*TI*, IX, 49, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 174). Goethe held that while the particular details of one's life might be shameful, if successfully assimilated into the whole of one's life, everything becomes vindicated.

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<sup>18</sup> Nehamas further explores this analogy between self-fashioning human beings and the artists. He suggests that in pursuing the project of self-fashioning one's choice of a particular action is similar to the artist's decision regarding their choice of a particular style – artistic decisions provide the model for all decisions. He stresses that this does not mean that one is free to do whatever one pleases, but rather that one's decisions, like the artistic ones, are constrained in numerous ways by society, history, etc. (Nehamas 1996a, 233).

As Zarathustra says: “[...] to recreate all ‘it was’ into ‘thus I willed it!’ – only that would I call redemption!” (Z, II, 20; see Nehamas 1985, 159, 160, 178). He adds: “All ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a grisly accident – until the creating will says to it: ‘But I will it thus! I shall will it thus!’” (Z, II, 20). Through Zarathustra Nietzsche laments over the fact that human beings are mere fragments and not integrated beings, left to the mercy of chance and numerous forces acting upon them. The aim is to interiorize, to make one’s own everything that has happened to oneself during one’s lifetime – most of which one had none or little control over. This one achieves by seeing everything from the single narrative perspective, in which all of one’s past goings-on make sense, leading to who one has become. Thus, there is no longer denial of some part of one’s life, only affirmation of the life in its entirety and the world of which it is a part.<sup>19</sup>

As May notes, this sort of fatalism and ‘willing the past’ might at first seem in conflict with Nietzsche’s emphasis on self-creation and the re-evaluation of all values (May 2009, 103). But this is not the case. Becoming who one is has both creative and factual aspects. Affirming the past requires understanding the past, that is, interpreting it. This interpreting is always perspectival and has a creative side to it (see Nehamas 1985, 56), as one needs to relate different parts of one’s life to each other, to integrate them into the larger whole, and to proceed living according to the story that one is telling oneself. Meanwhile, this fatalistic yet affirmative and creative attitude is perhaps best summed up in the following longing that Nietzsche expresses: “I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them – thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on!” (GS, 276; see EH, II, 10; Nehamas 1985, 146, 191).

## 7. Being Open to the Future

Giving an aesthetically satisfying form to one’s life does not involve only accepting and assimilating into a coherent narrative all parts of one’s past. It also presupposes a certain openness to the future, meaning the ability to integrate into one’s life whatever chance may bring.<sup>20</sup> It is to be able to turn misfortunes into opportunities, to select what is significant and forget what is not, not to be

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<sup>19</sup> Vasti Roodt brings attention in a particularly clear way to the interplay between the interrelatedness of everything and its affirmation (Roodt 2008, 416-418). It should also be noted, as Lawrence J. Hatab does, that affirming everything does not mean approving everything, or being satisfied with everything. To affirm everything is to be willing to relive all the parts of one’s life, including the worst episodes, the things one opposes, but only so that one could oppose and overcome them again. After all, the will to power, which is according to Nietzsche the fundamental drive of all life, always presupposes something that is to be overcome (Hatab 2019, 346-347).

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche notes that the sudden, unpredictable occurrences in one’s life that force one to break one’s current habits might be just what one needs if one’s way of living has become a monotonous routine (D, 130).



dumbstruck by unanticipated events but use the occasion to reinvigorate one's life, and so on (see *EH*, I, 2; Nehamas 1985, 230-231). After all, life is an on-going process, full of sudden twists and turns, and one's self-fashioning must accommodate this fact if it is to be worthwhile and manageable (Nehamas 1985, 185). It is not a finished product while a person is still alive, and even after when they are no longer alive, as their life can be subject to diverse interpretations – although those interpretations are in no way up to that person anymore.

Hence to give style to oneself does not mean that one's personality ossifies and becomes immune to changes, challenges, and opportunities that life brings. Nehamas emphasizes that the point is not for one's actions to become formulaic, but for one's character to become supple enough to be able to use whatever one has done, is doing, or will do “as elements within a constantly changing, never finally completed whole” (Nehamas 1985, 190). These changes could lead one to adapt one's style to the point that it actually evolves into a distinct style altogether. The unexpected events may even be so momentous that they force a person to outright abandon the story they have been telling themselves about themselves so far, and to come up with a new one (Nehamas 1985, 185). This is not necessarily a defeat of one's project of self-fashioning. Knowing when to abandon a style that no longer serves its purpose and being able to adopt a different one is a sign of having learned the lesson of perspectivism, which Nehamas regards to be firmly connected to Nietzsche's aestheticism (Nehamas 1985, 3-4). To have these capacities is, in Schoeman's words, to “understand the art of living” (Schoeman 2008, 438).

Finally, one's abandonment of a previous way of living, for whatever reason, could itself be incorporated as a constitutive part into the succeeding narrative that one tells oneself by showing how it led to or was necessary for the current style of life that one has adopted. Nehamas claims that the process of unifying all of one's characteristics, habits, actions, etc. in a single narrative can “integrate even a discarded characteristic into the personality by showing that it was necessary for one's subsequent development” (Nehamas 1985, 185). There is no reason why the same could not apply to a discarded way of living.

## **8. Becoming Who You Are**

The phrase that Nietzsche often uses to express his ideal of self-fashioning, and which Nehamas commends, is ‘become who you are’ (see *GS*, 270, 335; *Z*, IV, 1; Nehamas 1985, 169, 171-172, 174-175, 190). What do these enigmatic words mean? Immediately there seems to be some tension at work here. First, this phrase instructs us to become something, which normally means that we should become something that we are not at the moment – for example, one might say to a rude person to become more polite. But here comes the catch: these curious words urge us to become that which we (already) are. How does one accomplish such a feat? Moreover, if at the end of this process one is essentially returning to

where one has started, why engage in such an affair in the first place (see Nehamas 1985, 174-175)?

There is a further tension at play. Nietzsche, both the original and Nehamas's, all too frequently describes his project of living the ideal life as one of 'self-creation,' accentuating its artistic nature (see Nehamas 1985, 174, 188). This implies some sort of creative action on one's part – making something new that has not simply been there all along – we ourselves being the object of such an action, moulding ourselves into living works of art. However, if the words 'become who you are' suggest that the aim of this process is to achieve the state of being in which one already is, then it seems more appropriate to say that this is a case of self-discovery, self-knowledge, rather than self-creation. Instead of saying that one acts upon oneself – creates, forms, moulds, etc. oneself – maybe we should rather say that one comes to know, discover, find out one's true nature. This is perhaps one way to understand the words 'become who you are,' although Nehamas believes the process of self-fashioning to be more complex (see Nehamas 1985, 168-169, 174, 188, 190-191).

Let us start with the tension between knowledge and action. In order to mould oneself into a work of art one needs to know the material one is working on – one's very life and its manifold aspects. One needs to come to terms with what one has done (or did not do), what one has suffered (which could be painful and difficult to remember), with the desires and fantasies that one may not be proud of, with one's deepest thoughts and motivations for one's major life decisions, and so on. This is essentially achieving a kind of self-knowledge. A person needs this so as to try to fit all of these facts of their life into a single meaningful narrative (Nehamas 1985, 190). After all, an artist should know the material they are working on.

However, simply passively knowing all this about oneself and how it might fit into an overarching narrative is not enough; it is necessary to actively employ that knowledge in life. This includes novel actions on one's part that aim to harmonize with the self-narrative that one has built with the help of one's self-knowledge (Nehamas 1985, 168-169). For their part, these new actions provide material for further self-knowledge that leads to even newer actions, and so forth. In effect, we might say that knowledge-that generates knowledge-how, and vice versa in this process of self-fashioning. Thus (self-)knowledge and (one's) actions do not oppose each another, but feed into each other, keeping the process of becoming who one is alive and constantly rejuvenated.

The tension between knowledge and action is closely related to the one between discovery and creation. In becoming who one is, is one discovering – by coming to know – one's true nature that is already there, or is one creating it by acting upon the world and oneself (see Nehamas 1985, 174, 188)? Nehamas gives his favourite example, Proust's narrator, who allegedly 'creates' himself, as envisioned by Nietzsche's ideal of becoming who one is (Nehamas 1985, 188). Nehamas cites Proust's narrator according to whom "in fashioning a work of art

we are by no means free, we do not choose how we shall make it; it preexists and thus we are obliged, since it is necessary and hidden, to do what we should have to do if it were a law of nature, that is to say to discover it" (Proust 1981, 915, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 188). These words nicely capture the experience that many artists claim to have while in the process of creating art – rather than having an 'everything is possible' feeling regarding their artistic choices, they are somehow inexorably 'led' in a certain direction, as if the artwork is already there and they simply need to retrace its contours.

It must be noted that in Proust's previously mentioned sentence there is a strong emphasis on the discovery of one's self, and not on its creation. Why does Nehamas then keep putting forward Proust's narrator as a paragon of Nietzschean 'self-creation,' rather than simply of 'self-discovery'? Nehamas observes that what Proust calls "the discovery of our true life' can be made only in the very process of creating the work of art which describes and constitutes it" (Nehamas 1985, 188; see Nehamas 1985, 59). Or, as Nehamas claims elsewhere: "Our creations eventually become our truths, and our truths circumscribe our creations" (Nehamas 1985, 174).

What does Nehamas mean by these statements? Self-fashioning consists of fitting all of one's actions, thoughts, feelings, etc. into a single coherent narrative. This presupposes that a person has become willing to, post facto, accept responsibility for their entire past and to recognize that all of it makes them who they are (Nehamas 1985, 190-191). We can say, as does Nehamas, that self-fashioning represents "the creation, or imposition, of a higher-order accord among our lower-level thoughts, desires, and actions" (Nehamas 1985, 188). This willingness and recognition can, from different perspectives, be regarded both as a new state of character that has not been there previously, and as no specific state of character at all. Recognizing all of one's previous actions as one's own may result in a change of behaviour, but not necessarily. It depends on one's past and the style that one has adopted (Nehamas 1985, 188-189). To point out once again, becoming who one is has a processual structure: "[...] all those who are 'becoming' must be incensed to find in this area complacency [...]" (*WP*, 108, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 189). As Nehamas suggests, it would be more useful to think of becoming who one is as "a matter of degree," perhaps even as "a regulative principle," something to which one should strive but can never fully realize (Nehamas 1985, 182, 189).

Nehamas notices a further problem with the idea of somehow bringing to an end the process of fitting all of one's actions, thoughts, desires, etc. into a coherent whole. There is no sense in which we could enumerate one's mental states and actions in a single, privileged manner. The way they are enumerated depends on how we connect them to one another and to the whole of which they are parts. After all, the claim that one's actions and thoughts have value and meaning only as parts of a single whole that is never finalized is consistent with Nietzsche's overall worldview. One's life is always open to new reinterpretations

which may presuppose a different way of counting one's actions and thoughts (Nehamas 1985, 189). It is these reinterpretations and their 'creative' quality that preclude us from understanding the project of becoming who one is as a mere self-discovery of what is already there independent of one's perspective (see *WP*, 767; Nehamas 1985, 38, 61, 168). We may conclude that self-fashioning, as envisioned by Nehamas's Nietzsche, has elements both of self-creation and self-discovery.<sup>21</sup>

Let us return to the perhaps most obvious tension in the words 'become who you are,' the one between being and becoming. Nehamas tells us how to properly understand 'being' and 'becoming,' as these terms are used by Nietzsche, in order to remove the aura of paradox that surrounds the previous phrase.<sup>22</sup> To reiterate, becoming who one is consists in the continuous activity of accepting one's deeds, thoughts, desires, etc., and fitting them together into a coherent narrative, thus taking responsibility for one's life, which is what Nietzsche labels 'freedom' (*TI*, IX, 38; Nehamas 1985, 190-191). To achieve this freedom is an expression of the supreme will to power, which Nietzsche defines as follows: "To *impress* upon becoming the character of being – this is the highest expression of the *will to power*" (*WP*, 617, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 191).

It is crucial not to mistake this 'being,' in the Nietzschean sense, for something constant and solid (Nehamas 1985, 191). So, what exactly is this 'being'? The key for understanding it is the idea of the eternal return. Nietzsche states the following: "That *everything recurs* is the *nearest approach a world of becoming makes to a world of being* [...]" (*WP*, 617, quoted in Nehamas 1985, 191). Keeping in mind that to pass the test contained in the idea of the eternal return is to have arranged one's life contents into such a well-crafted unit that one would be willing to relive one's life in its entirety – because if anything would be different it would not be that life anymore – Nehamas proclaims: "Being, for Nietzsche, is that which one does not *want* to be otherwise" (Nehamas 1985, 191).

Therefore, to become who one is means not to exit one ontological state and enter another – it can be said that for Nietzsche all 'being' is nothing more than becoming, everything being connected with everything else and constantly changing (see *EH*, III, on *BT*, 3; *GM*, I, 13; Nehamas 1985, 146, 154-155) – but to accept that everything that one has done, is doing, and will do, has experienced, desired, and so forth constitutes who one is. Moreover, as a consequence of this

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<sup>21</sup> Conway and Pippin come to the same conclusion when discussing this kind of project (Conway 1997, 69; Pippin 2009, 77).

<sup>22</sup> Nehamas rejects a possible 'Freudian' interpretation of this phrase, according to which the self is identified with the unconscious content and one must 'become who one is' by making it conscious, because it goes against Nietzsche's non-substantive view of the self as an organizational achievement (Nehamas 1985, 173, 251). Nehamas also dismisses a possible attempt to interpret this phrase in an 'Aristotelian' way, as a call to actualize all of one's potential capacities. According to Nehamas, such interpretation presupposes that one's 'becoming who one is' has an end, since it is in principle possible to actualize all of one's capacities, and that it is essentially a process of self-discovering with no salient creative aspects, since one's capacities are already there from the beginning (Nehamas 1985, 175).

acceptance, one ought to strive to fit all of one's diverse and conflicting life's contents into such a cohesive narrative, so as to be willing to live one's life over and over again. This means to fashion oneself, or, as Nehamas quips: "[...] to be, we might say, becoming" (Nehamas 1985, 191).

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