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Nietzsche, Amor Fati and the Gay Science

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B I O G R A P H Y

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E D I T O R I A L N O T E

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Amor fati – the love of fate – is one of many Nietzschean terms which seem to point towards a positive ethics, but which appear infrequently and are seldom defined. On a traditional understanding, Nietzsche is asking us to love whatever it is that happens to have happened to us – including (and perhaps especially) all sorts of horrible things. My paper analyses *amor fati* by looking closely at Nietzsche’s most sustained discussion of the concept – in Book 4 of *The Gay Science* – and at closely related passages in that book. I argue that by ignoring the context in which Nietzsche writes about *amor fati* in *The Gay Science*, we are liable to ignore several exegetical and philosophical problems with the traditional understanding of the term. I’ll argue for a different interpretation which locates Nietzsche’s *amor fati* within the philosophical project of *The Gay Science* and which copes better with the objections that plague the traditional view.

I. THE TROUBLE WITH AMOR FATI

There are horrible things about our lives, which we are powerless to change. Plenty of us think those things should be met, where possible, with dignity or even serenity. Indeed, perhaps the most fearful things are fearful precisely because they cannot be met with dignity or serenity; I am thinking, for example, of certain kinds of mental deterioration. But, according to most readers, Nietzsche’s concept of *amor fati* demands something more: we should not merely accept but *love* the terrible things that befall us.

This, *prima facie*, is not an attractive ideal. One problem is that we can’t choose what we love. Another: if we could choose to love, ‘love’ would be something different – simpler, perhaps, but much less magical. Yet another, and the most significant: even if we could choose to love, there are plenty of things we would choose not to, though they have shaped us and formed part of our fate. Put simply: fate isn’t lovable. Adorno is among the first to object in this way. *Amor fati* looked too much like the pathetic love of the captive for the bars of his cage: ‘It would be worth asking the question whether there is any more reason to love that which befalls one, to affirm what is, because it is, than to hold as true what one hopes for.’¹ In other words: why admire those who change their desires to fit what they believe (lovers of fate), rather than those who change what they believe to fit what they desire (wishful thinkers)? After the Second World War in particular, *amor fati* looks utterly unconscionable – a bloated form of Stockholm Syndrome, the condition that some captives reputedly experience when they fall in love with their captors. Presumably, Stockholm Syndrome would be a ‘syndrome’ because we would like to treat the sufferers; we do not envy them for their ultimate, affirmative achievement.² I’ll refer to this third objection as ‘the problem of unlovable fate’.

¹ T. Adorno, (1951) *Minima Moralia*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/Main, Section 61 (my translation).

² Christopher Hamilton attempts to construct a notion of affirmation according to which a total affirmation would be possible in spite of unlovable fate – but it’s a religious one which Nietzsche could not have accepted. See ‘Nietzsche on Nobility and the Affirmation of Life’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Jun., 2000), pp. 169-193.

There are plenty of reasons, then, to be suspicious of *amor fati*. This paper sees what we can make of it through a close reading of its earliest appearance (and the context of that appearance), which is also its most emphatic statement. This occurs in the opening aphorism of Book 4 of *The Gay Science* (GS), which I reproduce in full:

For the new year. – I’m still alive; I still think: I must be alive because I still have to think. *Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum.* Today everyone allows himself to express his dearest wish and thoughts: so I, too, want to say what I wish from myself today and what thought first crossed my heart – what thought shall be the reason, warrant, and sweetness of the rest of my life! 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 makes things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer.³

With the possible exception of the poem which immediately precedes it, this is the only direct reference to *amor fati* in the whole book.⁴ It is a highly suggestive passage – lots of big, meaty notions: thinking and being; necessity and beauty; not to mention love and fate. An outsider to the idiosyncratic world of Nietzsche scholarship might expect those who have tried to comprehend *amor fati* to take this passage, to look at the book in which Nietzsche published it, and to see what, if anything, he says in that book about these big, meaty notions with which *amor fati* is evidently connected. That, in any case, is the method of this paper.

II. LOVE (I)

In a recent essay, the most thorough and direct treatment of *amor fati* to date, Han-Pile employs an interpretation of the four loves of antiquity: *agape*, *eros*, *caritas*, *philia* – particularly *agape* and *eros*.⁵ On her understanding, *eros* is a love which responds (and can be trained to respond) to properties of objects. *Agape* bestows properties upon its objects: they are worthy of being loved just because they are loved. Consequently, agapic love needs no training: it doesn’t matter what the love-object was like beforehand, because it is transformed by *agape*. The principle advantage of her agapic reading is that it solves the problem of unlovable fate: fate becomes lovable, transformed by *agape*.

Conceptually, agapic *amor fati* leaves us with plenty of concerns. It’s paradigmatically a divine (Christian) form of love meant to explain how god could love something as disgusting as us; so we might wonder how humans could generate it. The main problem, though, is exegetical. To begin with, though Nietzsche would have known the Classical Greek and New Testament contexts from which they are derived, there’s no particular reason to think that he distinguished between *eros* and *agape*

³ GS 276. All English translations of GS are from *The Gay Science*, trans. J. Nauckhoff, Cambridge: CUP, 2001.

⁴ The poet’s soul becomes ever healthier, ‘*frei im liebevollsten Muss*’.

⁵ B. Han-Pile, ‘Nietzsche and Amor Fati’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 19 (2011), pp. 224-261.

along these particular conceptual lines. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's greatest philosophical influence, understands them completely differently and, conventionally, *eros* has more to do with mania or delusion than training.⁶ Han-Pile provides just one quotation to suggest that Nietzsche ever thinks of love in terms of (her) *agape*: eight years before he mentions *amor fati*, Nietzsche speaks of a 'love that can bestow'. But the full context of this remark shows that love bestows something on the *lover* not, as the agapic reading would have it, on the beloved.⁷

Generally, though, Han-Pile takes her projections to be legitimate because Nietzsche's own pronouncements on love are so minimal.⁸ Her reader must find it odd, therefore, to see an aphorism devoted to love in the very same book of GS as the *amor fati* aphorism, which she does not mention. It is called 'one must learn to love'. As even the title suggests, this aphorism, if taken to inform GS 276, would run directly counter to her preferred interpretation, in that a love that can be learned is (in her terms) erotic, not agapic. The content bears this out. We learn to love everything (says Nietzsche) as we learn to love music: detecting certain properties; indulgence; habituation; fear of loss; enraptured love.⁹ Far from bestowing, the listener learns to pick out features of the object and trains herself to appreciate and love them as the beloved object 'gradually casts off its veil and presents itself as a new and indescribable beauty.' On Han-Pile's terms, this process is characteristic of erotic love. Looking back to the start of GS 276, note that Nietzsche wants to 'learn more and more' how to achieve *amor fati* which certainly looks to connect it with the love-learning of GS 334.¹⁰ Now the problem of unlovable fate returns: some pieces of music, and surely some aspects of fate, do not produce in us – no matter how patient and indulgent we are – anything like the love that Nietzsche describes.

Other GS aphorisms supplement Nietzsche's view of love; two suggested features complicate the picture. First, loving something requires not-loving something else: to the lover, Nietzsche tells us, 'the rest of the world appears indifferent, pale and worthless.'¹¹ If loving something means not-loving something else, then loving *everything* looks impossible. Second, we might think that loving something requires distorting it, *not* seeing it for what it is, *not* knowing too much about it: "The human being under the skin is an abomination and unthinkable to all lovers."¹² Here, loving a person means ignoring her natural physiology. In Swift's words: Celia shits. Again, this looks uncomfortable for the conventional picture of *amor fati*: if loving means being kept in the dark about some things, then how can we love what is necessary? Some

⁶ *Eros* is selfish and world-affirming; *agape* (= *caritas*) is selfless and world-denying. (WWR, Section 67). GS 14 has *eros* as a 'craving'.

⁷ SE, Section 6, pp. 162-3; Han-Pile (2011) p. 232.

⁸ Han-Pile (2011) pp. 224-5.

⁹ GS 334

¹⁰ David Owen briefly discusses the connection between GS 334 and GS 276, but the context is the rather different one of 'self-love', which is counted briefly by Nietzsche as another of the loves that must be learned. See his 'Autonomy, Self-Respect and Self-Love: Nietzsche on ethical agency' in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, K Gemes and S May (eds), Oxford: OUP, 2009 pp. 197-222.

¹¹ GS 14. The context of this remark is his claim that love has been treated as selfless and praiseworthy, when often enough it is the greedy quest for new property.

¹² GS 59. GS 276 allows, of course, for 'looking away'.

necessary things may well be an abomination to lovers; indeed, in this instance, Nietzsche is talking about the difficulty of loving what is (physiologically) necessary.

III. NECESSITY (I)

What sorts of features are ‘necessary in things’? We want to know, because in GS 276 Nietzsche wants to learn to see them as beautiful. The person who is supposed to love her fate (what is necessary) is confronted with a set of questions about fate and necessity, which fall roughly into two groups. First: is it my fate or is it the universal fate? Second: is *everything* to be understood as necessary, or is it merely certain features of things which are to be understood as necessary. The scope of what I must love will vary depending on how I think these questions should be answered. Loving just my own fate might be an easier prospect than loving that of others who are significantly less fortunate than I am.¹³ Thus, Han-Pile attempts to avoid some of the less appealing features of *amor fati* by suggesting that I don’t have to love the suffering of others.¹⁴ From her point of view – using, as she does, the whole of Nietzsche’s oeuvre to present *amor fati* – this is a peculiar move to make. At least in *Twilight of the Idols* (TI), Nietzsche could hardly be clearer that one can’t separate oneself off from others when it comes to making judgements; nor, for that matter, can one mark off particular features of oneself: ‘One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one is the whole...’; or, again: ‘the individual is a piece of fate from top to bottom, one more law, one more necessity for all that is to come and will be. Telling him to change means demanding that everything should change, even backwards.’¹⁵ If so, to love my fate without loving your suffering would be to fail to love what is necessary in things – namely, the monolithic whole, of which I am just a part. In the context of TI, this is even more troubling, because Nietzsche also holds very explicitly that one cannot make value-judgements about life as a whole – that is the grounds of his interpretation of the death of Socrates, which sets the philosophical work of TI in motion and would seem, at first glance, to rule out *amor fati* without further ado.¹⁶

Restricting ourselves to GS, we find similar suggestions, at least as regards all being necessary: ‘there are only necessities’, we are told emphatically.¹⁷ Here, the point is that we can’t separate the world into what is necessary and what is accidental, because ‘accidental’ only really makes sense in an anthropomorphised world – a world which intends certain things, gives certain commands, is an organism or a machine with a purpose. After the death of god (expressed in the previous aphorism) we must get used to seeing the universe as simple necessity.¹⁸ If there are only necessities, as GS

¹³ See, e.g., H. Staten (1990) *Nietzsche's Voice*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, pp. 75-76.

¹⁴ Han-Pile (2011) p. 246

¹⁵ TI vi 8; TI v 6. Translations from *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1968). London: Penguin.

¹⁶ TI ii. For a reading of this section in relation to *Twilight* as a whole, see T. Stern, ‘Nietzsche, Freedom and Writing Lives’, *Arion* 17:1 (2009), pp. 85-110.

¹⁷ GS 109

¹⁸ It is surprising, therefore, to find Nietzsche scholars telling us that Nietzsche requires us to learn to choose between what is and is not necessary in things, as though there is a fact about the matter; it is up

has it, then there's no reason to think we can carve out (and love) the necessary, while leaving behind the accidental or contingent. It looks very much like loving what's necessary is loving everything – everything that has been and will be, that happens to me and everyone else. But that does nothing to solve the problem of unlovable fate, not to mention love as comparative and ignorant.

IV. BEAUTY

The place of beauty in relation to *amor fati* is evident in GS 276. Identify what is necessary; see it as beautiful; hence, become someone 'who makes things beautiful.' On Han-Pile's reading, beauty-making prompts the agapic reading, which we have rejected. On another reading, Aaron Ridley's, this should direct our attention to the 'self-styling' approach advocated in GS 290. As it happens, Nietzsche dedicates an aphorism of Book 4 to a discussion of how to make things beautiful – a discussion which, like his treatment of love, finds no place in Han-Pile's analysis nor in Ridley's.¹⁹

One question we might have here is whether Nietzsche thinks that beauty is something which inheres in things or whether he thinks beauty is something we attach to things (or some combination). On the model of love explored earlier, *all* lovers are like the listener, discovering beauty in the object of their love (albeit they avoid discovering *everything*). This strongly suggests, of course, that beauty is there to be found. This is echoed in another remark about beauty: 'the world is brimming with beautiful things' which, unfortunately, we fail to recognise as such.²⁰ If beauty is a property of things, and *amor fati* is seeing everything necessary as beautiful, then it's only possible if everything has the property of being beautiful – here we face the problem of unlovable (unbeautiful) fate.

On the other hand, if beauty is (contrary to GS 334 and GS 339) something we can 'add' to things in perceiving them, then perhaps we could make fate beautiful. As with the discussion of love, Nietzsche's central discussion of making things beautiful arises in the context of his account of art and then moves from the artistic to the non-artistic case. GS 299 is called 'what one should learn from artists'. It opens as follows: 'What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are!' The methods include:

'To distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add *in order to see them at all*, or to see things around a corner and as if they were cut out and extracted from their context, or to place them so that each partially distorts the view one has of the others and allows only perspectival glimpses, or to look at them through coloured glass or

to those scholars to give us an explanation of how such a view would fit with his claims about global necessity. See, e.g., Owen (2009).

¹⁹ Mathias Risse briefly connects GS 276 with GS 299; but he makes no mention of what is involved in 'making things beautiful' – namely distortion – and thus the force of the connection is lost. See his 'The Eternal Recurrence: a Freudian look at what Nietzsche took to be his greatest insight' in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, K Gemes and S May (eds), Oxford: OUP, 2009, pp. 223-246, p. 227.

²⁰ GS 339

in the light of the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent.’ [Nietzsche’s emphasis]

The concluding remark is that artists merely do this with art, but we want to do the same thing with our own lives.

So we make things beautiful by distorting, misrepresenting, removing the informative context, seeing only partially, fabricating and so on.²¹ And, at least according to GS 299, nothing is beautiful in itself. For the reasons I have suggested, this latter claim doesn’t sit terribly well with what Nietzsche has told us about love – namely that loving something is learning to detect and appreciate, amongst other things, its beauty. But there it is: ‘in themselves I think they [things] never are [beautiful]’.²² Commentators who think *amor fati* means recognising the beauty inherent in one’s fate must explain how this should be reconciled not only with the problem of unlovable fate, but also, more pressingly, with Nietzsche’s own description of making beautiful.²³

V. TANGLE

We began with the aphorism on *amor fati* in GS, noting that it employed concepts like love, necessity, making beautiful. We looked for other aphorisms in GS which might shed light on these concepts. We found plenty. But we didn’t solve the problem of unlovable fate; instead, we found more problems, which it may be helpful to set out:

- (1) Loving requires recognising the beauty in things, but fate isn’t beautiful.
- (2) Loving requires preferring one thing to another, but loving fate means loving everything, altogether.
- (3) Loving requires ignorance about certain features of the beloved object; loving fate means loving what’s *necessary*; but what’s necessary is everything all at once.
- (4) *Amor Fati* requires making things beautiful; making things beautiful means projecting, distorting and falsifying; but lovers of fate are, one supposes, meant to love *fate*, not some distorted fantasy.

Taken together, this is a bit of a mess. We can either leave it there – admit that no coherent notion of *amor fati* emerges; or we can look further into what Nietzsche says, to make sense of these apparent contradictions. In the remainder, I’ll make a case for a

²¹ See also GS 59.

²² See also GS 109. Note that Nietzsche’s remarks on beauty, if fed into GS 276, also count against an agapic construal: making beautiful means distorting through presentation, not transforming through love; the object retains the qualities it always had.

²³ Cf. Simon May’s claim that *amor fati* ‘entails affirming [...] the ‘piece of fatefulness’ that we each are, its necessity and its beauty.’ See his ‘Nihilism and the Free Self’ in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, K Gemes and S May (eds), Oxford: OUP, 2009, pp. 89-106, p. 97.

version of the latter which addresses these concerns. What I want to emphasise here is that the rival interpreter of GS 276 owes us an explanation of how it relates to the other aphorisms we have explored – aphorisms which explain ‘making beautiful’, ‘love’, ‘necessity’; aphorisms which sit, in broad daylight, alongside the appearance of those terms in Nietzsche’s presentation of *amor fati*. If a commentator chooses to ignore these passages, she also owes us an explanation.

VI. NECESSITY (2)

Thus far, we have taken ‘what is necessary’ to indicate those features of the universe which are necessary independently of mankind: if we were to sneak behind the veil of human thought and perception, we would find them waiting for us. But we also find, in GS, plenty of discussion of what is necessary *for us*. Such necessities are not merely, as Ridley would have it, ‘normatively structured constraints’ upon our actions – that is, necessary conditions for certain kinds of projects, arising from particular social institutions like language or artistic practice.²⁴ In fact, they are surprising and completely general claims about what all humans must do, if they are to survive at all. The basic message is: if we are to survive, we must use our cognitive abilities; but our cognitive abilities are necessarily entwined with error. Living means thinking, thinking means erring. This, after all, is the book in which Nietzsche very clearly and repeatedly considers it an error to think that there are ‘things’ *at all* (which poses a challenge to those lovers of fate who seek for ‘what is necessary in things’ or to ‘make things beautiful’).²⁵ There appear to be two main motivations. The first is broadly ‘evolutionary’: we are ‘wired’ to draw certain false conclusions in order to survive. The second looks straightforwardly metaphysical: the world is a permanently changing ‘flux’ but, in order to navigate through it, we fabricate, simplify and falsify; little argument is given, but Nietzsche is presumably drawing on his Schopenhauerian inheritance.²⁶ Whatever the motivations, this is clearly his view and it isn’t meant to be taken lightly: insight into the errors at the core of our cognition threatens to be ‘utterly unbearable’.²⁷ No doubt, the Nietzsche of GS holds it as evident that such errors are necessary for human survival. But as yet this merely adds a further complication to the picture above: not only does the analysis of love, beauty and necessity make loving fate an impossibility; to cap it all: if we are to survive, we must manipulate and distort the world through the employment of our cognitive powers, so it’s likely that whatever we take to have happened to us will in any case be a distortion, not a neat representation of reality. No doubt, any attempt to understand the *amor fati* of GS must grapple with its insistence on error. Most shy away. Oddly enough, this last complication offers us a clue as to how the knot might be untangled.

²⁴ Cf A. Ridley, ‘Nietzsche on Art and Freedom’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 15: 2 (2007), pp. 207-8. Ridley interprets *amor fati*’s ‘necessity’ in the light of GS 290’s remarks about giving style to one’s character; I discuss, below, a tension in this passage. In any case, it is odd to read GS 290 in isolation from GS 107 and GS 299 – both of which speak of making an artwork out of one’s life and both of which firmly connect that process with error.

²⁵ See GS 110; 111; 112; 121; 189; 228; 335 see also GS 58 and GS 157.

²⁶ See esp. Schopenhauer, WWR, Sections 13 and 30, though there are important differences.

²⁷ GS 107

VII. LOVE (2)

There is one further place in which Nietzsche speaks of love in a way that might connect it to *amor fati*: in GS 57, Nietzsche mocks the ‘realists’ – those who (falsely, for Nietzsche) think that the world really is as it appears to them – for their ‘love of ‘reality’’. Given the scorn that Nietzsche pours upon the ‘lovers of ‘reality’’, it’s unlikely that they are the successful embodiment of *amor fati*; indeed, they are *amor fati* gone wrong. Their mistake, it seems, is two-fold: first, they take their perceptions of the world at face value, as though (in Nietzsche’s example, perhaps from Schopenhauer) the cloud they see is real and independent of human cognition; second, they take their contemplations and perceptions to be sober and unemotional.²⁸ *Amor fati* is something Nietzsche longs for; but the “lovers of ‘reality’” are to be mocked; their mistake, it seems, is to misunderstand both what the world is like *and* how they necessarily stand in relation to it.

Commentators have a tendency, when quoting GS 276, to leave out the opening sentences. In doing so, they cut out the one, solitary specific ‘necessity’ that gets mentioned in that section – the ‘*muss*’, which connects thinking and being (‘ich muss noch leben, denn ich muss noch denken’). The point is, as we know, a very familiar one from GS: to be alive, we have to think; but to think is to err – and we don’t get any choice about that. Hence we are told, in GS 189, that to be a ‘thinker’ is to make things simpler than they are. Taking this ‘*muss*’ seriously, my suggestion is that loving what’s necessary for us means loving that we get it wrong – that we misrepresent, simplify and misconstrue. If human beings are to walk the earth, they must, more or less constantly, be in error. What Nietzsche is saying, then, is that he wants to be the kind of person who loves *that*. If this is the intended object of Nietzsche’s love, then it does bear upon our problem of unlovable fate: for our very understanding of ‘what happens to us’ has already been modified by the erroneous way in which we stand towards the world. Now, Nietzsche should not be read as telling us that our terrible fates and sufferings never really happened, or that we invented them. The point is just: coming to terms with the fact that our cognitive faculties err must come first, prior to dealing with their suspect products. To be unaware of our falsification of the world – to think that we must love things as they appear to be, to pay no attention to how we distort in apprehending – is to be those lovers of ‘reality’ ridiculed in GS 57, not GS 276’s lovers of fate. Indeed, since he is clear that some of the errors we make are liable to mislead us about just what counts as ‘necessary’, paying attention to what is necessary means paying attention to our errors.²⁹ *Amor fati*, I would suggest on the basis of this reading, is not a personal theodicy – a demand to love thy cancer: it is, rather, the hope for a way of coming to terms with what is necessary for us, namely our error. Whatever your attitude towards what happens to you, it is conditioned by the (suspect) manner in which you conceive of such things.

²⁸ See Schopenhauer, WWR, Section 35. We have already seen why Nietzsche might think of these as errors. The next aphorism, for example, offers some familiar grounds.

²⁹ GS 335 ends by encouraging us to study what is necessary. It opens by mocking someone who holds certain moral views as necessary by assuming, erroneously, that actions may be isolated and repeated (i.e. that there are ‘things’).

If we connect these remarks with Nietzsche's claims about making beautiful, we can't help but notice a certain similarity between what Nietzsche thinks artists do to make the things beautiful and what we all do anyway, in error, to survive. What is necessary, I've said, is misconstruing, distorting, simplifying and falsifying; what artists do is just that, but knowingly, with a purpose; and, following his description of this artistic activity, Nietzsche demands that we do the same for our own lives. What seems to be called for, then, is a kind of second-order distortion in relation to the necessary first-order distortion. We cope with our immersion in error, by using just those erroneous practices to make this error beautiful.

There is a further section of GS – called 'our ultimate gratitude to art' – which certainly supports this interpretation. It opens as follows:

'Had we not approved of the arts and invented this type of cult of the untrue, the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science – the insight into the delusion and error as a condition of cognitive and sensate existence – would be utterly unbearable.'³⁰

Science teaches that our thinking is bound up inextricably with error – something which Nietzsche obviously finds shameful or hard to bear; what artists provide us with is a kind of error we admire. Error can't be all bad, if some of our most admirable figures are deliberate error-makers. From our discussion so far, it's clear why Nietzsche holds that the errors of artists and our erroneous conditions of existence are so closely linked. But although their structure is very similar, our attitude is completely different: with artistic errors, 'it is no longer eternal imperfection that we carry across the river of becoming – we then feel that we are carrying a *goddess*.'

The final part of GS 107 calls 'us' to recognise our need to balance scientific insight into error with artistic use and glorification of error. With art, we can laugh or cry at ourselves, as the situation demands. More often than not, he thinks, it demands laughter. He asks: 'How then could we possibly do without art and the fool?' It is a condition for our existence that we are bound up in error; it is a condition for the existence of those Nietzsche admires that they recognise this, that they make it beautiful and, furthermore, that they recognise *both* of these conditions and find a way to come to terms with them. What we have here, I am suggesting, is both *amor fati* and a 'gay science'.³¹

The biggest interpretative leap I have made is to equate what's 'necessary' in *amor fati* with the cognitive errors that evidently concern Nietzsche in GS – a move that is suggested by GS 276 and fits well with passages like GS 107 or GS 335. This yields a picture of *amor fati* as follows: what Nietzsche wants to learn to love and make beautiful is the error that conditions our existence – the connection between thinking and living alluded to at the start of GS 276. What he recommends is the artistic appropriation of these errors at a second-order level – to make these errors

³⁰ GS 107

³¹ On Nietzsche's hope for a future in which art and science are inseparably combined, see GS 113.

beautiful.³² As it happens, this reading works against the problem of unlovable fate and the four concerns identified above. It takes our attention away from the unpalatable thought that we must love or find inherent beauty in all the horrible things that befall us (contra the problem of unlovable fate and (1)). We are not asked to love *everything* that happens to us (contra (2), (3)). Instead, we are asked to love those distortions and partialities that are conditions for our thought and life; to do so, we must make them beautiful, treat them in a partial and distorted manner; hence, contra (4), there's no incompatibility between loving our fate (which is to distort) and beautifying (distorting).

VIII. A COMPARISON WITH BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL (BGE)

A thought that has guided this discussion deserves its place in the open. Nietzsche scholars are far too relaxed about picking and choosing from his different books to construct a version of Nietzsche that suits their particular interests. Since this is overwhelmingly the prevailing and unquestioned method in contemporary Nietzsche scholarship, it is worth paying attention to how it might lead us astray. In the case of *amor fati*, it results in the relevant connecting passages of GS being cut out, in favour of passages from Nietzsche's unpublished notes, his autobiography, Zarathustra's speeches, or aphorisms from later works, like BGE. This would be unobjectionable if his views about some of the key notions associated with *amor fati* (in GS) were not subject to change in the coming years. As it happens, they were.

A brief look at BGE will have to suffice. BGE exhibits many of the same thoughts we found in GS, none of which fit well with the conventional picture of *amor fati*: the horror of thinking as erring; love as selective, ignorant, erroneous and deceptive; beautifying as distorting or falsifying.³³ There are also signs of change. In our first discussion of necessity, we saw Nietzsche conclude that all is necessary because the 'accidental' has no place in a deanthropomorphised universe. One might wonder why 'necessity' is permitted, where its opposite – the accidental – is dismissed as anthropomorphic projection. Indeed, in BGE Nietzsche adds necessity to the proscribed list, for this reason.³⁴ The BGE view, then, is that *nothing* is strictly necessary: just what would it mean (following the conventional reading) to 'see what is necessary in things', if there aren't really things and nothing is necessary?

A more significant change occurs in Nietzsche's attitude to the artistic view of life. GS praises this and, in my view, connects it positively with *amor fati*. But BGE offers a highly critical description of turning one's life into an artwork, of beautifying it: it is characteristic, Nietzsche tells us, of negative, religious ways of thought – the product of pessimism, of spoiled life; to call our everyday fabrications 'artistic' is to speak deceptively and hypocritically.³⁵ Elsewhere he contrasts falsifying, deceitful, erroneous,

³² By way of analogy, think of BT's dreamer who knows he is dreaming and wants to keep dreaming nonetheless.

³³ BGE 16, 39; BGE 67, 163, 269; BGE 59, 230.

³⁴ BGE 21

³⁵ BGE 59; 192

beautifying activity with that of the seeker after knowledge: affirming and loving belong to the former, but saying ‘no’ belongs to the latter. In contrast to GS, it is the *latter* – the nay-sayer and seeker of knowledge, not the yea-sayer and lover – with whom Nietzsche clearly identifies himself. This is the aphorism which concludes with the statement of a Nietzschean task: ‘to translate man back into nature.’ A great deal has been made of Nietzsche’s purported naturalism, but one thing should be clear from this section: translating man back into nature means freeing him from various *supernatural* ideals, notably the conceptual cluster of beautifying, falsifying and affirming which were glorified in GS but now, as we have seen, are viewed in a suspect, religious light. Looking back, we might find the seeds of this conflict in GS. After all, GS 107 commends art for making a ‘goddess’ out of error; and yet the very next aphorism is the first place in which Nietzsche proclaims the death of God, demanding that we combat his influence. In ridding ourselves of God, we may, in the end, have defeated the Error-Goddess, Art, who was hiding in his shadows all along.

IX. THE TROUBLE WITH AMOR FATI (REVISED)

Plenty of concerns remain. One, familiar enough to Nietzsche scholars, is that scientists, in revealing our errors, appear to be granted some truthful engagement with the world despite the error that necessarily enmeshes us all. Whether we conclude that the ‘truths’ of science aren’t that secure or that the errors of life aren’t that necessary, the picture is destabilised. And for reasons of space, we haven’t connected *amor fati* with its purported cousin, the eternal recurrence, which also appears in book four of GS. Obviously, anybody who simply equates eternal recurrence with a standard reading of *amor fati* must confront the problems given above. My thought, expressed elsewhere, is that the eternal recurrence has a rather different function.³⁶

Yet if there is one guiding line for this discussion, it is the interaction between passivity and activity in human life: to what extent do we make our lives, to what extent do they just happen to us? The Stoics – with whom *amor fati* is frequently connected – responded by dividing sharply between what’s completely in our control and what isn’t. Once that line is drawn, it makes sense to locate ethical responsibility on the controlled side and to confront all else with perfect indifference. For those, like Epictetus, who draw this line most sharply, what’s beyond our control is a matter of strict indifference to us – though fate is admirable, of course, as god’s benevolent plan. If Epictetus commends a positive attitude towards particular (apparent) misfortunes like suffering or bereavement, it is only because they may be celebrated as a nobler test of Stoic indifference, rather as Hector would (*en principe*) prefer fighting Achilles to fighting Thersites. For Stoics, a key element on the ‘active’ side was total control over what you believe. In the thought-experiment in which his interlocutor is progressively tortured – a thought-experiment of which Epictetus is understandably if perhaps overly fond – the interlocutor can always keep control of what he believes to be true, though he controls little else: I can’t *force* you to believe that $2 + 2 = 5$; so your beliefs

³⁶ See T. Stern, ‘Back to the Future: Eternal Recurrence and the Death of Socrates’, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 41 (Spring, 2011), especially pp. 76-9.

are really *yours*; hence I can judge you for them. If faulty cognition could be imposed, then the whole Stoic structure would crumble, not least because those who happened to be right would be on a par with those who happened to be wealthy or powerful – the sorts of contingent things Stoics were taught to ignore.

For Nietzsche, *amor fati* begins with just that destructive thought – namely, with the idea that cognitive errors *are* forced upon us, that they belong firmly on the ‘passive’ side. It is up to us to respond to *that*. The response he prescribes, artistic self-beautification, seems a paradigmatic combination of passive and active. Love of fate actively confronts the given fact of our inadequate cognition with whatever beautifying means available – a love that, as Diotima tells Socrates, is the child of Poverty and Resourcefulness. Yet here we find, preserved, the same problem in miniature: active or passive? Do we create the beauty or do we find it? Is the lover deluded or an active affirmer of her discovery?

Nietzsche equivocates. His lover of fate is both beautifier (the artist, GS 299) and lover (the art lover, GS 334): that is, manipulator and manipulated. Presumably, the lover of fate is meant to be in a superior position both to the everyday person, ignorant of her errors, and to the scientist, who reveals and is shamed by the horrifying secret. But either we aren’t aware of our successful efforts to beautify and falsify our errors – hence we are like the former; or we are aware of such efforts – hence we are like the latter. This is an old problem for Nietzsche, with which he explicitly struggles in *The Birth of Tragedy*: there, the Schopenhauerian framework affords room for manoeuvre between an everyday, human perspective in which being ‘aestheticized’ confers little benefit, a universal perspective which enjoys the spectacle and an artistic perspective in which the former, however fleetingly, connects with the latter.³⁷ This is how the tragic Greeks become active rather than passive sufferers. By GS, the absence of Schopenhauer’s framework makes the division even less clear: in places Nietzsche seems to flicker between the perspective of the self-beautifier and the observing other, active and passive, saying little about how they relate or where the benefit lies.³⁸

Finally, though, the *amor fati* on offer is a peculiar kind of ‘love of necessity’. We may be able to respond to (4), above, by showing that technically *amor fati* needn’t rule out the love of fantasy. But the sentiment remains: this is not a love of *necessity* at all, but rather a love of an artistic representation of one particular necessity, beautified by manipulation. We originally asked, with Adorno, why we should prefer *amor fati* to wishful thinking; what we have here looks like wishful thinking after all.

³⁷ BT 5.

³⁸ GS 209; also GS 107, 299.



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