

Introductory Chapter

I. The Research setting and question(s)

The argument in this dissertation revolves around a positive reading of Nietzsche on the tragic nature of existence. The specific narrative being advanced is that for Nietzsche, the task of individual fashioning must be conceived and examined within the tragic nature of existence. In fact, it can be claimed that, on Nietzsche's account, existence properly conceived as tragic *ipso facto* demands a qualitative individual response. I argue that the qualitative response amounts to an affirmation of life via cultivating singular individuality. These assertions respond to two related questions: What accounts for Nietzsche's conception of singular individuality as a task? And how to create the necessary conditions for singular individuality? Nonetheless, this dissertation also toils with the question of communality and tragic existence. If existence is tragic within Nietzsche's scope, then is a communal response tenable enough? Does the *aporia* of existence fundamentally demand an individual or communal response? These questions are precisely engaged with under Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as the type which properly affirms existence as tragic.

This research is conceived within two supposedly unrelated settings: Nietzsche's philosophy of the type *Übermensch* and African ethno-philosophy. The two settings inevitably are responding to the same reality, the *aporia* of existence.

Within Nietzsche scholarship there are two competing responses to the question of what Nietzsche is committed to. The first group of scholars, non-individualists, contend that Nietzsche is committed to the enhancement of the human species in general. In an attempt to support their human-enhancement stance, they refer among others to a text in *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche alleges: "everything evil, terrible, tyrannical, predatory, and snakelike in humanity serves just as well as its opposite to enhance the species 'humanity.'"² Here, Nietzsche apparently addresses himself to optimum conditions for human enhancement. It is worth noting that the non-individualists draw their supporting claims largely from Nietzsche's *Nachlass* material. But this may not necessarily invalidate their stance.

² *BGE*, § 44.

The non-individualists also claim that Nietzsche is concerned with a form of human existence in terms of culture. Their notion of culture entails societies and states that lie between individual human and humanity. They augment their argument by alleging that Nietzsche values culture as culture, and not instrumentally, by appealing to Nietzsche's praise of the Roman Empire.³ The proponents of the human-enhancement thesis hold that the passage says nothing explicit about the production of singular individuals. They hold that Nietzsche's valorisation of the achievement of the Roman Empire must be taken in its own right, as the most grandiose form of organization under difficult conditions.⁴ Their overriding assertion is that cultures can be valued in their own right without necessarily appealing to the enhancement of singular individuals. The non-individualists apparently do not present a compelling argument contra the largely accepted position of Nietzsche that, the locus of value is ultimately the singular individual.

The second group of scholars believe that Nietzsche envisages the attainment of individuality (the singular individual) or the life of the type *Übermensch* as the ethical task of his philosophy. This group relies partially on Nietzsche's strong polemics against the state as a justification for their standpoint. To counter the claim of cultural valuation as an end in itself they appeal to Nietzsche's observation that the individuals, not the masses, "form a kind of bridge across the turbulent stream of becoming."⁵ Then, the task of critical history is spelt out as the mediation between individuals, inspiring the production of the great man. The proponents of this individuality stance rely partly on Nietzsche's assertion that "the *goal of humanity* cannot lie in its end but only *in its highest*

³ The text in question is from *AC*, §58: "That which stood *aere perennius*, the *Imperium Romanum*, the most grandiose form of organization under difficult conditions which has hitherto been achieved, in comparison with which everything before and everything since is patch-work, bungling, dilettantism . . . Christianity was the vampire of the *Imperium Romanum* —the tremendous deed of the Romans in clearing the ground for a great culture *which could take its time* was undone overnight by Christianity . . . this most admirable of all works of art in the grand style, was a beginning, its structure was calculated to *prove* itself by millennia—to this day there has never been such building, to build in such a manner *sub specie aeterni* has never been so much as dreamed of!"

⁴ Joe Ward, "Nietzsche's Value Conflict: Culture, Individual, Synthesis" in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Penn State University Press, Spring 2011): 7.

⁵ *HL*, § 9.

exemplars.”⁶ The highest exemplars as Nietzsche alleges from *Schopenhauer as Educator* onwards, are inseparable from individual’s response to life as tragic. Hence, I can claim that Ultimately, the overarching concern from Nietzsche’s standpoint is how to honestly respond to existence. This question demands a positive engagement with Nietzsche’s narrative on the *aporia* of existence. Hence, I will largely confine myself to the tragic aspect of Nietzsche’s thought as the justifier for singular individuality or otherwise.

In his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche references Silenus’ enigmatic response about existence: “not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second-best thing for you is—to meet an early death.”⁷ The terrors and horrors of existence are at the heart of Greek religion according to Nietzsche. Thus, religion served as a response to such existence. But Nietzsche wants to pose a radical question: how can a human being face existence on its own terms? One of the principal aims of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Nietzsche’s development of singular individuality, through the process of individual cultivation, is an attempt to solve the tragic *aporia* of human existence. It is on these tragic grounds and the ensuing singular individuality that I will critique aspects of African philosophy of sociality.

Hence, this dissertation also seeks to evaluate the ethno-philosophical conditions of African thought that apparently privilege the communal over the individual. On the communal account, I will be arguing, firstly, that African communal tendencies are not first and foremost given, but are a response to the tragic nature of existence; secondly, that African philosophical discourse on sociality is partly reactionary in relation to Western discourse about Africa. In being reactionary, African philosophy of sociality largely fails on the existential aspect of appropriating the sense of the tragedy. This dissertation attempts to deconstruct some assumptions of African philosophy of sociality. One such assumption is the cliché that Africans are communal by nature. One ethno-philosophical communal phenomenon central to this dissertation is expressed in one ethnic group’s moral maxim as *shienyu ni shienyu*. This is a communal moral maxim among the *Abaluyia* ethnic group of Western Kenya which literally translates ‘your own is your own.’ However, what it stands for is far more than what it expresses. Fundamentally, this

⁶ *HL*, § 9.

⁷ *BT*, § 3.

notion originates in the understanding of the African philosophy of sociality. In engaging with African philosophy of sociality the underlying question is: How tenable are the projections of communal moral maxims in facing existence in its actuality as tragic?

The position of the philosophy of sociality is that the terrors of existence can only be encountered communally. However, this dissertation shows that the stance of African philosophy of sociality is challengeable even within the evolving African philosophy itself. Proponents of African philosophy of sociality, in their hasty search for identity-oriented approach to existence, imposing moral maxims are sought, and existential problems generally glossed over. The nagging question in Nietzsche's narrative of existence as tragic is whether he has any social development parameters. Within what schemes could the communal or institutions be envisaged by Nietzsche? These questions are raised against the backdrop of a common belief that Nietzsche lacks a plausible social program (Nietzsche talks of the great world of action). However, this dissertation will show that a credible social program could accrue from the commitment to existence as tragic. In addition, it will be shown that, when life is valorised from its existential demands, communal approaches as starting points could be inadequate. Having stated the underlying questions and context of the research, I now reaffirm the thesis as follows: Nietzsche's stance on existence as tragic is the *conditio sine qua non* for individual *autopoiesis* and any critical dialogue with ethno-philosophy and *cosmopoiesis*.

II. The objectives of the research

The first and very basic objective of this study is to understand Nietzsche's position on singular individuality, how it can be undertaken and sustained within the conditions of the type *Übermensch* as the affirmer of life as tragic. The type *Übermensch* as the quintessence of the possibility for singular individuality will be studied with its allied themes of the will to power and the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence. Nietzsche problematizes the modern culture based on how they enhance or limit individual perfection through *autopoiesis*.

Secondly, the study seeks to show that, in dialogical terms, Nietzsche's process of producing the singular individuality could be a valuable tool for evaluating some aspects of the African ethno-philosophy, particularly the communal aspect. It is demonstrated that fellow-feeling is largely meant for the preservation of the ethnic group. Thus, moral

maxims for fellow-feeling like *shienyu ni shienyu* are largely responding to an existential problem. The positive appropriation of Nietzsche's affirmation of life as tragic requires moving beyond the philosophy of sociality. That movement entails seeking to engage with life beyond the communal identity schemes, which demands embracing the uncertain world. Hence, a movement is made from *shienyu ni shienyu* to *shienyu ni shibala*.

And finally, given the experimental nature of Nietzsche's critique, this study envisages individual *autopoiesis* as the enabler of *cosmopoiesis*. This innovation here is in the realization that Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy contains a highly compelling philosophy for social change through culture. Nietzsche's commitment to the singular individual is not an end in-itself. The cultivation of singular individuality could enable the transformation of customs and institutions of nations. Therefore, singularity/individuality is Nietzsche's ground for values and as such is apparently central for responding to the complexities of human existence. These objectives are realized in five chapters divided into two parts: I. The conditions for individual *autopoiesis*, which entails chapters one, two and three. II. Dialogue with ethno-philosophy of *shienyu ni shienyu* and *cosmopoiesis*, covered under chapters four and five. But before the systematic presentation of these two parts, clarification of terms is needed.

III. Pertinent terminologies and usage

Autopoiesis

In Nietzsche, the term *autopoiesis* as defined by the Greek Lexicon implies: 'doing it of oneself; freely, spontaneously.' For Nietzsche, the process of self-cultivation/*autopoiesis* entails overcoming. In this dissertation, *autopoiesis* implies self-cultivation/self-production/self-making through the psychology of the *Übermensch*, which is overcoming. This is opposed to the prevailing sense in biological sciences where the underlining objective for *autopoiesis* is self-preservation.

In the contemporary literary sense, *autopoiesis* is properly speaking a biological science concept. As such, *autopoiesis* is associated with living systems as autonomous self-interpretative beings. In early 1970s, there arose academic interests on the link between biology and cognition. Two Chilean biologists, H.R. Maturana and F.J. Varela, sought for the relationship between cognition and living organisms. They realized that the main character of organization in living things is autonomy. The two

biologists referred to the phenomenon that takes place in the dynamics of autonomy proper to living organisms as *autopoiesis*.⁸ Furthermore, they affirmed what biology already knew, that the self-regeneration of the living organism is within a cultural, historical, and social context. What apparently intrigued them in their work with individual cells was the rationale behind the autonomy perceptible in the cells' generation, remaking, and reformation. The whole process of continual self-making (described as generation, remaking and transformation) seems to be the very definition of life.

Maturana explains that the origin of the term *autopoiesis* is from the dilemma in Don Quixote's *de la Mancha*, whether to follow the path of praxis/arms or the path of *poiesis* /creation, production.⁹ *Poiesis* is selected as the description of the dynamics of autonomy in the living organisms. Hence, Maturana and Varela argue that an *autopoietic* system remakes itself through continual self-recreation, reproduction, reinvention, and renovation. As a system, an *autopoietic* structure "pulls itself up by its own bootstrap and becomes distinct from its environment through its own dynamics, in such a way that both things are inseparable."¹⁰ These dynamics of living systems are mostly for self-preservation, which is not the objective of individual *autopoiesis* in the case of Nietzsche, who privileges overcoming.

Cosmopoiesis

Cosmopoiesis is an architectural terminology understood as the action of "world-making."¹¹ It starts from the world already in existence; thus, *cosmopoietic* making entails re-making. The usage of this term in this dissertation implies the gradual transformation of the world envisaged through *autopoiesis*. *Cosmopoiesis* in this dissertation has connotations of social change as envisioned through Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's conception of social change is that it must be in tandem with

⁸ H.R. Maturana and F.J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The realization of the living* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing, 1980), XVII.

⁹ H.R. Maturana, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, XVII.

¹⁰ Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: the biological roots of human understanding*, trans. Robert Paolucci (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 46–47.

¹¹ Marco Frascari, *Eleven Exercises in the Art of Architectural Drawing: Slow Food for the Architect's Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2011), 94.