

How is Self-Fashioning Possible? Nietzsche on Agency and Freedom

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In this paper I shall explore how self-fashioning, as conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche, is possible. My goal is to show that self-fashioning is not jeopardized by Nietzsche's determinism and his rejection of traditional ideas of selfhood, agency, and freedom. First, I shall clarify why the abandonment of this traditional conception of human beings is seen by some as deleterious to the project of self-fashioning. Afterwards, I shall argue that Nietzsche is a determinist: he maintains that one could not have acted otherwise. If thought of in this way, freedom is impossible. However, Nietzsche also has a more positive conception of freedom. Following John Richardson's reading of Nietzsche, I shall examine the three main stages through which freedom evolves. I shall expand Richardson's account with a corresponding analysis of Nietzsche's notion of responsibility. Finally, we shall see how a discussion of such issues allows us to understand how self-fashioning is possible.

Keywords: Friedrich Nietzsche – self-fashioning – self – agency – freedom – responsibility

I. The Problem with Self-Fashioning, Agency, and Freedom

The theme of self-fashioning is prominent in Nietzsche's inquiries. For example, in a famous passage from *The Gay Science* he declares: "To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art!" (GS, 290),¹ while later he adds that those emancipated, meaning Nietzsche and his "free spirits," "want to be poets of our

¹ Nietzsche's texts are cited by section number using the standard English-language acronyms: *Human, All Too Human* (HH); *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (WS); *Daybreak* (D); *The Gay Science* (GS); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z); *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE); *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM); *The Twilight of the Idols* (TI); *The Antichrist* (A); *Ecce Homo* (EH); *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA).

lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details" (*GS*, 299). Elsewhere, he writes: "In human beings, *creature* and *creator* are combined" (*BGE*, 225); and so forth.² There are various interpretations of his views on the subject. Here I shall focus on what is, to my mind, perhaps the central question that any account of Nietzsche's ideas concerning self-fashioning must answer: how can Nietzsche's passionate calls to fashion oneself be reconciled with his vehement attitudes against traditional conceptions of freedom of the will and human agency, without which the prospect of self-fashioning appears unthinkable?

According to Nietzsche, a human being does not have a substantial, unified self, as traditionally often presupposed. Rather, like other living organisms, it consists of diverse drives of varying strength that often compete, and sometimes even cooperate, with each other in order to dominate the whole of the organism and thus satisfy their own particular ends. However, selfhood can be attained, at least to a certain degree, when all of one's drives become so organized that they are directed towards the same goal (*D*, 109; *BGE*, 12; *GM*, I, 13; Nehamas 1985, 85, 171, 177 – 178, 180 – 182; Čukljević 2023, 8). In brief, self-fashioning is the process of organizing one's drives. Given this, Robert B. Pippin wonders *who* is engaging in self-fashioning, if a self only comes into being at the end, if at all? It seems that self-fashioning is not a genuine action, or a series of actions, on our part. It is simply an event that occurs to some, not an achievement for which a person can take any credit (Pippin 2015, 144, 151 – 152).³ These doubts appear to be corroborated by Nietzsche's implication that self-fashioning is primarily an unconscious process (*EH*, II, 9).⁴

And even if it would be possible to locate an agent behind self-fashioning, would not Nietzsche's avowed determinism and dismissal of the customary notion of free will render any such agency hollow, and the related project of self-fashioning illusory (Young 2010, 306)?⁵ An adequate reading of Nietzsche ought to show how his proposal to fashion oneself makes sense within his deterministic perspective which abandons traditional conception of selfhood, agency, and freedom (Janaway 2009, 66; Young 2010, 305).

² See *D*, 109, 560; *GS*, 107; *TI*, IX, 49; Čukljević (2023).

³ See Janaway (1991, 137 – 138); Young (2010, 304 – 305).

⁴ See Čukljević (2023, 8 – 10).

⁵ See Leiter (2001, 281 – 289).

II. Nietzsche's Determinism

In *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche espouses determinism in its classical formulation:

...everything here is necessary, every motion mathematically calculable. So it is too in the case of human actions; if one were all-knowing, one would be able to calculate every individual action, in advance ... The actor's deception regarding himself, the assumption of free-will, is itself part of the mechanism... (HH, 106).

Here, determinism is opposed to freedom of will, conceived as the existence of real alternatives to one's actions, i.e. the belief that one could have done otherwise than one had.

However, not all scholars agree whether Nietzsche was a determinist, at least in the sense that he held that all events are causally determined by antecedent events. Some believe that this is too "metaphysical" a view for Nietzsche to commit himself to, and that his declarations of determinism represent just a passing phase, or toying with the idea for polemical purposes (Gemes 2009, 37 – 38; Janaway 2009, 62 – 64). After all, in his later writings Nietzsche states: "Cause and effect: there is probably never such a duality; in truth a continuum faces us, from which we isolate a few pieces..." (GS, 112); and: "In the 'in-itself' there is nothing like 'causal association' " (BGE, 21). In his *Nachlass* Nietzsche writes in the same vein: "What is at stake is not a *succession* — but an *interpenetration*, a process in which the individual successive moments do *not* condition one another as causes and effects..." (KSA, 2[139]).⁶

While, for these reasons, one should be careful when ascribing determinism to Nietzsche, it would be difficult to deny that he is a determinist in a certain sense. For Nietzsche claims that "all our doing ... is ... a continuous flux, ...freedom of will is incompatible precisely with the idea of a continuous, homogeneous, undivided, indivisible flowing" (WS, 11),⁷ and that "A person is necessary, a person is a piece of fate, a person belongs to the whole, a person only *is* in the context of the whole..." (TI, VI, 8).⁸ Likewise in his *Nachlass*: "In a world of becoming in which everything is conditioned, the acceptance of the unconditional ... can only be an error" (KSA, 35[51]).⁹ From evidence such as these it can be concluded, as Alexander Nehamas does, that Nietzsche is a

⁶ See KSA, 2[61], 2[78].

⁷ See KSA, 36[23].

⁸ See Young (2010, 381 – 382); TI, IX, 33.

⁹ See KSA, 2[85], 2[143].

determinist in the sense that he holds that everything is connected to everything else and thus conditioned by the world of which it is just a tiny part and which is in constant flux, and that a person could have acted otherwise only if the whole world had been different (Nehamas 1985, 78 – 83, 154 – 157, 248).

Thus, although later in his career Nietzsche would formulate his determinism in slightly different terms, which reflected his views on causality, the crux remains: one could not have acted otherwise in the same circumstances.

The *causa sui* is the best self-contradiction that has ever been conceived ...
The longing for “freedom of the will” in the superlative metaphysical sense ... means nothing less than being that very *causa sui*... (BGE, 21).

According to Nietzsche, the main consequence of accepting determinism, and thus rejecting the aforementioned notion of freedom, is that a person can no longer be held morally accountable for their actions or character, since they are conditioned by the whole world. Hence to feel guilty or remorseful, to blame or to morally praise, to hold that someone deserves something, etc., is unfounded, because it all rests on “the error of accountability, which rests on the error of freedom of will,” understood as the thesis that one could have done otherwise (HH, 39, 105, 107; TI, VI, 7).¹⁰ Instead, Nietzsche celebrates “the *innocence* of becoming” and being conscious of it, meaning that the acknowledgment of determinism (should) release(s) human beings from moral condemnation, guilt, etc., as they realize that they are, like everything else, “innocent” (TI, VI, 7, 8; HH, 107).

III. What Freedom Is

Nietzsche denies that anyone has free will in the sense of the ability to escape the nexus of determinism, and he draws from this significant implications for human self-conception. However, he also has a much more positive and interesting story to tell about freedom, showing that it is attainable for at least some, if properly understood (Gemes 2009, 34, 41, 46; Young, 2010, 499 – 500). As Richardson observes, this story is a naturalistic one: it shows how to understand freedom not as some mysterious faculty of a transcendent(al) subject, but as a natural capacity of some living organisms which, in the case of humans, evolved (and is still evolving) biologically, socially, and culturally in a specific way, as a result of certain selective forces – together with the organism’s own perception of its freedom, which is not necessarily accurate; Nietzsche’s

¹⁰ See Ridley (2007b, 131); Gemes (2009, 33, 35 – 36, 39, 46).

story also shows what freedom, given this history and Nietzsche's own values, can yet become, i.e., how can we further fashion ourselves as free agents (Richardson 2009, 129 – 132). Because what freedom is and how we think about it are relative to the specific historical context, and different senses of "freedom" accumulate over time, it cannot be straightforwardly defined; to properly understand it, we must look at its history (Richardson 2009, 130 – 132).

Richardson argues that Nietzsche discerns three main cumulative stages of the evolution of freedom, the last one advanced by Nietzsche himself (Richardson 2009, 132). The first stage takes place entirely at the level of drives, which, as Nietzsche believes, constitute a human being, as there is no pre-given self. Although humans believe that their "selves" choose a specific action, it was actually a certain drive that happened to dominate all the others at that moment (Richardson 2009, 132 – 133; *D*, 119). Yet, Nietzsche maintains that there is a sort of freedom to be found even here (Richardson 2009, 133).

First, in Richardson's words, "freedom is a drive's own feeling of power, while it commands another drive," what Nietzsche calls the "affect of command" (Richardson 2009, 133; *KSA*, 38[8]; *GS*, 347: *BGE*, 19).¹¹ It is contrasted by the drive's (feeling of) inability to achieve its gratification, being overpowered by another drive (Richardson 2009, 133; *KSA*, 38[8]). A drive has a flawed perception of its freedom, as it is ignorant of its own origins (Richardson 2009, 133; *HH*, 18). Richardson notes that for Nietzsche this is a rudimentary version of freedom; the next step is to identify freedom at the level of a whole organism, as a certain unity of its drives. Drives differ in their force and direction, often conflicting among themselves, with the stronger subduing the weaker, and these relations change over time. Richardson discerns several ways in which Nietzsche regards the drives as unified (Richardson 2009, 133 – 134).

When one drive governs another, an organism does not just experience the stronger drive commanding, but also the weaker one obeying. This presupposes that an organism has the ability to experience all of its drives as parts of itself and to synthesize their different perspectives into a single outlook (Richardson 2009, 134; *KSA*, 38[8]). Richardson notes that Nietzsche regards this kind of unity as just the beginning, with all organisms exhibiting it, and that further unity is required to attain a higher degree of freedom and selfhood (Richardson 2009, 134).

¹¹ See Gemes (2009, 48); *D*, 109.

Nietzsche often links this unity to efficacy: an organism's drives should be so unified that the organism can successfully cope with the world. Yet, Richardson believes that Nietzsche holds this efficacy as a consequence of unity proper, not identical to it (Richardson 2009, 134 – 135). A better candidate for this unity may be found when a complex network of relationships between various drives of an organism becomes fixed, giving each drive a stable position within it; this leads to the aforesaid efficacy.¹² Optimally, the nexus of drives should be presided over by a single commanding drive (Richardson 2009, 135; *D*, 245; *GS*, 290; *EH*, II, 9).¹³

Thus freedom emerges as the ability of an organism to be directed by a single dominant drive, which has abiding power over the other drives, thereby fashioning a certain responsible self (Richardson 2009, 135 – 136). Simon May would add that the more powerful the drives are the more powerful the whole organism is, as long as the hierarchy prevails and all drives are directed towards the same goal. On the other hand, the more numerous the drives are, the more perspectives the organism will have at its disposal. Naturally, the more diverse and powerful drives one has, the more difficult it is to achieve their unity (May 2009, 93 – 94).¹⁴ Still, the harder it is to achieve this unity, the more admirable the person who can achieve it is (*TI*, IX, 38; Nehamas 1985, 7, 187 – 188; Čukljević 2023, 10 – 11).

While the first stage does not take into account human consciousness, the second one does. Richardson claims that Nietzsche is aware that, even though drives are the chief factor, reflection and deliberation also play a certain role in our lives and he wants to change that role.¹⁵ Reflection and choice represent a new sort of freedom; in their own way, they also imply the “affect of command” (Richardson 2009, 136 – 137). Contrary to an organism's ability to unify its drives, these abilities are specifically human and have social origins. However, they are on the same level as drives, and not privileged as often believed, competing with them, as drives do among themselves, for the control of the whole organism (Richardson 2009, 137 – 138). Further, as Richardson notes, reflection and decision are intrinsically related to consciousness and language, which, according to Nietzsche, evolved in order to make communication easier. Hence these abilities are not impartial instruments of the drives; they express particular interests. Their main function is to socialize and normalize us, not to

¹² See May (2009, 90 – 91); *A*, 14,

¹³ See Nehamas (1985, 61); Janaway (2009, 58); Young (2010, 307, 500).

¹⁴ See Gemes (2009, 43).

¹⁵ See Young (2010, 306).

serve one's individual interests (Richardson 2009, 138 – 140; *GS*, 354: *TI*, IX, 26). This is achieved by what Nietzsche calls "the ability to promise," which presupposes other abilities, such as the ability to recall one's commitment and to follow through it despite possibly having opposing drives (*GM*, II, 1, 3); before that, people were punished without even being able to remember their commitments (*GM*, II, 4). Although initially these commitments concerned "contractual relationship between *creditor* and *debtor*" (*GM*, II, 4, 8), they also include social norms in general (*GM*, II, 9; Richardson 2009, 139 – 140). The ability to promise was accomplished by the invasive "*technique of mnemonics*" (*GM*, II, 3, 5; Richardson 2009, 140). From this chapter of human self-fashioning "the *sovereign individual*" emerged, "whose *prerogative it is to promise*" (*GM*, II, 2; Richardson 2009, 129, 142).

This agency essentially involves the ability to reflect and decide, which implies the idea of a substantial "I," and together with it a false notion that it is this conscious "I," rather than the drives, which constitutes one's core, as well as that it has a unique freedom and power to control the drives – which is true to some extent – and to decide entirely unconstrained by them and social factors alike – which is patently false according to Nietzsche (Richardson 2009, 141 – 143; *KSA*, 35[35]; *GM*, II, 3). Because the conscious "I" serves social interests, Nietzsche believes that drives are closer to what is truly individual in us, but their aforementioned unity, commonly found in animals, is destroyed by reflection and choice; in this they are assisted by (bad) conscience, which often curbs even the strongest drives, those that can unify the others, and turns them against themselves by unleashing its "pang" on oneself whenever one acts on those drives, all the while disguising its true aim to socialize us (Richardson 2009, 142 – 143; *GM*, II, 14 – 17; *TI*, II, 9 – 11; *TI*, IX, 26). Nietzsche espouses that in order to truly become an individual these conscious abilities should be made subservient to the unity attained by the drives, which are governed by a single dominating one, whom faculties of reflection, choice, and conscience should help to sustain this unity instead of undermining it (Richardson 2009, 143 – 145, 147; *EH*, II, 9; *GM*, II, 2; *GS*, 107; *BGE*, 158). One would then take pleasure in perceiving oneself as commanding, able to pursue, over a long time, those projects that are not dictated to one by some external factor (May 2009, 91 – 92; *GM*, II, 2). Nietzsche believes that it will be easier to fashion oneself in this way once morality, its presuppositions being challenged, loses its hold on us, as we will no longer feel the need to curtail our drives, although they have already become vastly diverse and weakened, making it difficult for a single dominating one to emerge (Richardson 2009, 145).

Richardson identifies a still greater form of freedom, which Nietzsche regards as his own contribution to freedom's evolution. It consists of one's knowledge of freedom's naturalistic history and various interests that shaped it, which is Nietzsche's "genealogy" that we have seen Richardson explicating. This knowledge gives us the freedom to revalue previously held values and the power to refashion ourselves to the extent that our circumstances allow us to, all in order to deliberately, rather than just instinctively and incidentally, bring about harmony between the unity achieved by the drives and the abilities to reflect and choose, with a single dominating drive leading and the conscious abilities following (Richardson 2009, 145 – 149).¹⁶

IV. What Responsibility Is

Richardson states that Nietzsche firmly relates his idea of freedom to the ideas of power, selfhood, and responsibility (Richardson 2009, 129);¹⁷ all these are related to self-fashioning, as they imply certain (re)organizing of one's drives. Although Richardson remarks how Nietzsche retains the traditional dependence of responsibility on freedom despite rejecting the traditional idea of responsibility, as well as that responsibility comes in stages analogous to freedom (Richardson 2009, 129, 132) – Nietzsche talks of "the long history of the origins of *responsibility*" (*GM*, II, 2) – he does not go into depth about what responsibility entails at these different stages. This is especially pertinent when one remembers Pippin's doubts concerning whether one could be regarded as responsible for one's own self-fashioning.

Ken Gemes claims that the term "responsibility" is ambivalent. Being responsible for an act can mean that one deserves punishment or reward for it, or it can simply mean that one is the agent whose act it is. Gemes links the former meaning to the conception of freedom that Nietzsche critiques, and the latter to Nietzsche's positive notion of freedom (Gemes 2009, 34, 39). This suggestion is of limited applicability because those who would claim that a person should be punished or rewarded for an act would insist that the reason for this is that this act is that person's, as reflected in the fact that the person could have acted differently. Hence Gemes's second meaning seems more fundamental to both sides, and a deeper analysis of it will help us understand Nietzsche's notion of responsibility.

¹⁶ See May (2009, 89 – 90, 105 – 106).

¹⁷ See Gemes (2009, 36 – 39); *GM*, II, 2; Nehamas (1985, 187, 253); Čukljević (2023, 21).

Some authors note that Nietzsche often stresses that it is the artists who most saliently experience the confluence of freedom and necessity, with the former presupposing the latter (Nehamas 1985, 47 – 48, 61, 187 – 188, 194 – 195, 219; Young 2010, 309; Čukljević 2023, 20 – 21, 24 – 25; *BGE*, 188, 213; *TI*, V, 3). Aaron Ridley, in my opinion, gives the best explanation of this. He claims that only an intentional action can be called “free,” and it requires having a reason to act so, as well as the ability to provide and answer to reasons, which demands engagement in a socio-linguistic practice governed by rules that transcend an individual. Some rules can be made explicit, others cannot. Regarding the first, Ridley gives an example of chess rules, which enable one to play the game, rather than restrain one’s freedom. Alas, here one could get an illusion that one’s will is curbed, wishing that, e.g., chess rules were different, so that one could make moves which are not normally allowed. There is no such problem with the other kind of rules, exemplary being the various unstatable laws that govern artistic creation. One could not experience them as constraining and wish that they were different, since they are not known beforehand; they become apparent only after they are transgressed. This is why artists, when making a correct artistic move, experience that they have found what they were looking for without knowing ahead of time what it was exactly. As Ridley says, in this way through artmaking one can uncover one’s true intentions (Ridley 2007b, 131 – 134; Ridley 2007a, 216 – 217; *BGE*, 21, 188). There is no possibility of delusion regarding one’s intentions here, as one does not know exactly what one intends to do (although one might have a general idea) until they have done it. Therefore, as Ridley notes, one could not want to have acted differently, because such an action is nothing more than the realization of one’s intention: “My action is ‘mine’, as it were, all the way down” (Ridley 2007a, 215 – 216).

Although Ridley has only humans in mind, one could argue that a rudimentary form of this agreement between intention and action might be found even in animals,¹⁸ and that this represents the prehuman responsibility related to the first stage of freedom’s evolution, when all of an organism’s drives become aimed at the same goal under a single dominant drive.¹⁹ If an organism’s intentions are realized in its actions, and its intentions are well-focused and do not conflict with each other, then, as Richardson states, the organism is “reliable” and “predictable” (Richardson 2009, 136).

¹⁸ See Andrews, Monsó (2021).

¹⁹ See *GM*, II, 1, 16.

Once we take into account human consciousness and language, thus entering the second stage of freedom's evolution, the notion of responsibility becomes related to the ability to respond to the question "Why did you do so-and-so?," i.e., the ability to make an act discursively intelligible. As we have seen, the ability to reflect and decide engenders the idea that one is a "causa sui," with an inner life transparent to oneself. In that case, one would be the sole causal originator of an act, and thus able to make an act intelligible simply by citing one's motive and intention; this would then constitute one's responsibility.²⁰ Nietzsche attacks both presuppositions of this position (*BGE*, 32). As stated, there is no such thing as "causa sui." Still, if only this presupposition was denied, one could perhaps maintain, similar to David Hume, that one is responsible for an act if it arises from one's character (Gemes 2009, 37 – 38). One could not know what process(es) led to one having specific character, motives, etc., but they at least know their own motives and intentions, which makes them responsible for an act. However, according to Nietzsche, we might, and often do, delude ourselves regarding our own motives and intentions, and thus utterly fail to provide an adequate answer to the question "Why did you do so-and-so?." Hence the first step to establishing one's responsibility would be to discover the real motives and intentions behind one's actions (Young 2010, 305; Janaway 2009, 59; *BGE*, 32). This kind of responsibility corresponds to the freedom attained when one's consciousness becomes attuned to the unity achieved by one's drives.

Nietzsche believes that this consonance of intention and action, and thus one's responsibility, can also be established after the fact. As Ridley nicely puts it, the traditional position that Nietzsche opposes holds that the main question regarding freedom is "Could I have done otherwise?," while for Nietzsche it is "Would I have done (willed) otherwise?." How precisely an action was brought about is not particularly relevant to what Nietzsche is trying to say (Ridley 2007a, 215 – 216). What matters is "...to recreate all 'it was' into 'thus I willed it!'" (*Z*, II, 20), therefore extending one's responsibility as far as it is possible (*BGE*, 212). What does this mean? Nehamas throws some light on the answer. Becoming responsible, and thus fashioning oneself in such a way, involves continuously assuming one's actions as one's own, which is a necessarily interpretative process, by finding a place for them in a coherent life narrative that shows how one has become who one is and which one would be willing to live again in its entirety (Nehamas 1985, 160 – 161, 190 – 191; Čukljević 2023,

²⁰ See Richardson (2009, 137, 141).

15 – 16, 22, 25 – 27). It also includes coming to terms with what Nietzsche's genealogy reveals about how modern humans emerged as products of various, often horrifying, shaping forces (May 2009, 97 – 98, 103; Young 2010, 467). This kind of self-conscious effort to extend one's responsibility over the entirety of one's life correlates with the final stage of freedom's evolution and represents the apex of self-fashioning.²¹

A case could be made that being a "causa sui" would put at risk this highest type of responsibility. Gemes notes how Nietzsche suggests that one could not be morally responsible even if one could have acted otherwise: if one was a "causa sui," then one ultimately acts without a reason, and hence cannot be morally responsible (Gemes 2009, 40; *WS*, 23). Whether this argument is good is not relevant here; what is important is that a related argument can be made regarding Nietzsche's kind of responsibility. Nietzsche's exemplar of a responsible individual consists in having all of one's past actions so intimately related to each other and forming such a well organized narrative that if any action had been different the whole would suffer (Nehamas 1985, 136, 154 – 157, 165, 194; Čukljević 2023, 12, 15 – 16). All of one's actions are to be regarded as necessary parts of the whole, namely one's life narrative, leading one to become who one is. It thus seems impossible that one could have acted otherwise than one has: that would have been a different person. This idea is, to a degree, present even in our daily conversations. When someone says "X could have done otherwise," a person who knows X well will often respond with "But then they would not be X." If all, or even some, of one's past actions could have been different, doubt would be cast upon the tenability of Nietzsche's ideal of responsibility. First, one could then only *pretend* that there exists a connection between one's actions such that if any of them were different the whole would crumble, because one could have indeed acted differently while remaining the same person. Second, it would become unclear why anyone would insist on this ideal; if one can choose between various alternative actions in the future, why accord so much importance to accepting one's past and seeing how it made one the person one is today? Why not forget about the past if it is too difficult to deal with, or simply not to one's liking, and instead focus solely on the future? And so, the existence of real alternatives to one's actions would call into question Nietzsche's ideal of responsibility.

With the new conception of responsibility comes a new conception of how to evaluate one's actions and character. Traditionally, being responsible implied

²¹ See Richardson (2009, 146 – 149).

deserving punishment or reward, being blamed or praised. Gemes thinks that we should distinguish these dichotomies. While Nietzsche's kind of responsibility does not allow for the first dichotomy, it is compatible with the second. Gemes illustrates this with an example of how we judge dead historical figures. Some may praise Socrates, but this is not the same as rewarding him. Others may blame Socrates, but this is not the same as punishing him. Gemes believes that this type of judgement may be passed even on those still living. We may praise or blame someone if we deem them as having a certain positive or negative impact. Thus we aim to promote or hinder that person's impact in the future (Gemes 2009, 34 – 35, 43).

There is an important element lacking in Gemes's account of evaluating persons and their actions within Nietzsche's framework. Gemes claims that Nietzsche's sort of freedom has a certain normative aspect to it, but he does not explore this further, merely stating that being free in Nietzsche's sense is valuable in itself, at least for some (Gemes 2009, 46 – 47). While Gemes correctly discerns a consequentialist aspect in the aforementioned assessments, he does not specify the aesthetic element in them, although he aptly calls Nietzsche's conception of the self "a naturalist-aestheticist" one (Gemes 2009, 46). Nevertheless, Nietzsche provides clues as to this "aestheticist" element. He claims that we must regard humans and their actions similarly to how we regard works of art, which we do not morally praise, as they cannot choose to be otherwise and thus lack moral desert; yet, we "can admire their strength, beauty, fullness" (*HH*, 107). This leaves open the possibility of an aesthetic evaluation of humans and their actions.²²

V. Conclusion

The previous discussion of Nietzsche's views on determinism, freedom, and responsibility enables us to answer the question posed at the beginning of this paper: how is self-fashioning possible? Regarding Nietzsche's determinism, we have to concur with Julian Young that whether or not one engages in self-fashioning, and how one does it, is fully determined:

...that one *desires* to combat the vehemence of a drive at all, however, does not stand within our own power; nor does the choice of any particular method; nor does the success or failure of this method (*D*, 109, quoted in Young 2010, 306).²³

²² See Nehamas (1985).

²³ See Leiter (2001, 315 – 319).

This should not lead to pessimistic fatalism: a human being is (a part) of the world, not a separate entity opposed to it. Fear of determinism stems from the belief that we are, in some cardinal way, distinct from the rest of the world (Young 2010, 268):

In reality every man is himself a piece of fate: when he thinks to resist fate ... it is precisely fate that is here fulfilling itself; the struggle is imaginary, but so is the ... resignation to fate; all these imaginings are enclosed within fate (WS, 61).

Once we come to comprehend the interconnectedness and continuity between us and everything else, we should be able to recognize that determinism poses no peril either to human actions in general or to self-fashioning in particular.

Still, under such circumstances, could one be counted as responsible for one's self-fashioning and receive praise for it? According to Nietzsche, one is not morally responsible or praiseworthy, since one could not have acted otherwise. On the other hand, there is nothing that prevents one from being responsible in Nietzsche's sense(s). Nietzsche thinks of responsibility as he thinks of selfhood and freedom: as an achievement, not a given, which comes in degrees, not all at once; thus it is markedly different from the aforementioned moral responsibility. If there is a harmony between those intentions and actions that lead to one's self-fashioning, then one is responsible for one's self-fashioning in the sense available at the second stage of freedom's evolution. This responsibility was not present from the very beginning of the process of self-fashioning, but rather emerges through it, along selfhood, freedom, and agency. Furthermore, one can become responsible for one's self-fashioning in the way obtainable at the final stage of freedom's evolution, if one self-consciously incorporates their own project of self-fashioning into their life's narrative. Again, the forms of selfhood, freedom, and agency related to this highest type of responsibility are entirely shaped in the process of self-fashioning, and do not precede it, which would render one responsible for one's self-fashioning from the very start – that is not the case for Nietzsche. This is congruous with his motto "become who you are" (GS, 270, 335).²⁴ Moreover, although not morally praiseworthy, one can be appraised in aesthetic terms, as previously stated. Once we realize this, it should become clearer how self-fashioning is possible within Nietzsche's framework. Whether the basic tenets of this framework are compelling is a different matter.

²⁴ See Čukljević (2023, 23 – 27).

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