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Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture

Huddleston, Andrew

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

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NIETZSCHE ON THE DECADENCE AND FLOURISHING OF CULTURE

Andrew Huddleston

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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[Advisor: Alexander Nehamas]

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Abstract

"Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture"

In 1872 Nietzsche shocked the European philological community with the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this fervid first book Nietzsche looked to ancient Greek culture in the hope of finding the path to a revitalization of modern German culture. Cultural health was at this point unquestionably his paramount concern. Yet postwar Nietzsche scholarship has typically held that after his *Untimely Meditations* which followed soon after, Nietzsche's philosophy took a sharply individualist turn—an interpretation largely due to Walter Kaufmann's noble and influential effort to counter the Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche by stressing Nietzsche's anti-political individualism and downplaying his seemingly more noxious *Kulturphilosophie*. But even after Nietzsche gave up on the idea of *German* culture as something blessed with inner truth and greatness and pregnant with the potential for renewed splendor–heaping scorn instead on the Germans and their newly-founded Reich–he still, I argue, continued to take culture, as a collective social achievement, to be something of prime importance. Indeed, it is for this reason that he took the flourishing of great individuals–especially artists and intellectuals–to be vital. Their singularity and their excellence redeems the decadent cultural landscape from the bovine blight of the "last man" and the self-satisfied, uncreative, and barren mediocrity he represents. My dissertation uses Nietzsche's perfectionistic ideal of a flourishing culture as a point of departure for investigating many of the central themes in his work: his criticism of the ideals enshrined in conventional morality; his attack on Christianity; his celebration of individual human excellence and cultural accomplishment; his lamentations about cultural decline; his troubling remarks about the need for slavery ("in some sense or other") if a society is to flourish; and his grand ambitions for a "revaluation of all values."

For Melanie Sharp and Mark Huddleston, my mother and father.

Preface

Nietzsche has a reputation for drawing neophytes into philosophy. Then, after a brief infatuation, these people move on, the fascination with Nietzsche abandoned like other passing teenage phases, going the way of angst-ridden brooding in one's room or black fingernail polish. Or so the story often goes. Teenage rebellion was never my thing. (My personal style in high school was so square, in fact, that were I not fifteen at the time, one might well have mistaken me for a banking executive.) I thus first read Nietzsche not by rebellious choice but out of academic duty when I was assigned *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in a German literature class my freshman year of college. Far from being thrilled, I found it overblown and boring. Despite this inauspicious first encounter, I nonetheless went on to read more Nietzsche and would later become captivated.

His texts are in many ways deceptively easy and often entertaining to read. But they are far more baffling when it comes to trying to distill and convey their philosophical significance in a clear and (relatively) precise way. That is the challenge that drew me to write my dissertation on Nietzsche, and it is one of the things that keeps me most excited about working on him now.

Many find in Nietzsche's work a tangle of inspired observations, with no overall coherence. While it is surely right that Nietzsche is not the sort of systematic thinker that Kant or Hegel is, and while it is also right that he expresses scorn for their drive to develop a philosophical "system," it does not follow that Nietzsche's philosophy is rife with contradiction or disunity. Far from being a scribbler of disparate charges, there are a number of importantly unified strands in his mature thinking. In my dissertation I try to work out his views about culture and its importance. Even when I am not convinced that Nietzsche is right in his claims, I find him a tremendously stimulating philosopher to read and think about.

Some doubt whether it is worthwhile to study the history of philosophy for its own sake, and by extension, they doubt whether it is worthwhile to study Nietzsche as a historical figure. We would never study the history of chemistry to find out about chemistry, it is sometimes put. So why study the history of philosophy to find out about philosophy?

To this one should say that there are just different philosophical projects. One kind of project is to figure out satisfying answers to issues in contemporary philosophy. Another kind of project is to engage with the philosophical texts of the past and to uncover the positions they present. Both tasks are exercises in truth-seeking. The first seeks the truth about contemporary issues, the second seeks the truth about what the most plausible and historically-sensitive philosophical reconstruction of an important text, or body of texts, is. These works from the past can of course often shed helpful light on contemporary issues, but they don't need to play this instrumental role in order for them to be worth studying–any more than philosophy needs to furnish a person with marketable job skills for it to be worth studying. It is far from obvious that answering some question in contemporary philosophy is inherently more important than understanding what Plato's, Kant's, or Nietzsche's works say. These all seem to be worthwhile humanistic intellectual projects, valuable in their own right. When it comes to Nietzsche, I find that simply providing a clear explanation and reconstruction of his writings is a rewarding intellectual task.

But why take Nietzsche as someone worth studying? Sometimes this question, even when coming from people whose judgment I respect, takes a more pointed form, in such a way as to suggest that my choice of dissertation topic is philosophically bankrupt or that I am intellectually sophomoric or morally depraved for continuing to occupy myself with someone of Nietzsche's sort. I sometimes feel I would like to be able to give the doubters, again especially those I admire, some sort of concise and convincing explanation of why I think Nietzsche is worth reading. But that, I've come to think, is not the right approach. It is better to provide an interpretation that, in bringing Nietzsche's most compelling claims to the fore, indirectly demonstrates why he is worth the time of at least some people. That is what I aim to do in my dissertation. I'm concerned to work out his philosophical positions not so much because I think he is likely to be right about all of them, but because I think that what he does have to say is deeply provocative and interesting, even if it is wrong.

During my time as a student here at Princeton, I've been fortunate to be part of a wonderful and stimulating intellectual community.

A number of people provided comments or helpful conversation on one or more of the chapters in this dissertation. I'd like especially to thank: Anthony Cross, Richard Chappell, Jeremy Forster, Ken Gemes, Josh Gillon, Des Hogan, Mark Huddleston, Benjamin Kiesewetter, Marco Lopez, Errol Lord, Stephen Mulhall, David Nowakowski, Bernard Reginster, Whitney Schwab, Jack Spencer, Michael Smith, Nick Smith, Nick Stang, and Rahel Villinger.

I am grateful to members of the Princeton Dissertation Seminar and the University Center for Human Values Graduate Prize Fellows Seminar, as well as to audiences at the European Society of Aesthetics, the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Kings College, London, Johns Hopkins University, Oxford University, the Princeton Workshop in Normative Philosophy, and the Universities of New Hampshire, Reading, and Southampton, where I presented versions of this material.

I'd like to thank as well Mark Johnston and Anthony Appiah, both of whom have been a considerable help along the way. Neither is a Nietzsche specialist, but their tremendous philosophical acumen and intellectual broadmindedness have sharpened my interpretations at many points.

It is to Alexander Nehamas–my *Doktorvater*, as one would say in German–that I owe the most intellectually. My chapter drafts invariably come back covered with his incisive and generous comments on every page. These strike the perfect balance between being critical and encouraging. Although my own reading of Nietzsche is in many ways at odds with the individualistic interpretation Alexander has developed over his career, he nonetheless has been thoroughly devoted to helping me advance my own reading. This is his most admirable quality as a teacher: He does not seek to create disciples. He shapes students to be independent thinkers, staking out their own claims, even when this means diverging from his views. It has been a privilege to be advised by the greatest living scholar of Nietzsche. And it has been a pleasure to spend many afternoons with him in friendly conversation, whether about Nietzsche or about the rest of life.

In moderation, the time spent *not* writing a dissertation is as important as the time spent writing it. The countless hours I've spent with my friends–Errol Lord, Nick Riggle, Whitney Schwab, and Jack Spencer especially–have been a welcome diversion, not to mention a great pleasure in their own right.

And last but not least, I'm grateful to my parents and the rest of my family for their love and support.

A.H.
Princeton
August 2012

That philosophy is no cold abstraction, but experience, suffering, and sacrificial deed for humanity, was Nietzsche's knowledge and example. In the course of it, he was driven upward into the icy wastes of grotesque error, but the future was in truth the land of his love, and for posterity, as for us, whose youth is incalculably indebted to him, he will stand, a figure full of delicate and venerable tragedy and enveloped by the flashing summer lightning that heralds the dawn of a new time.

–Thomas Mann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events"

Jeder Engel ist schrecklich. Und dennoch, weh mir,
ansing ich euch, fast tödliche Vögel der Seele

–Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

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Introduction

In 1872 Nietzsche shocked the European philological community with the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this fervid first book Nietzsche looked to ancient Greek culture in the hope of finding the path to a revitalization of modern German culture. Cultural health was at this point unquestionably his paramount concern. Yet postwar Nietzsche scholarship has typically held that after his *Untimely Meditations* which followed soon after, Nietzsche's philosophy took a sharply individualist turn—an interpretation largely due to Walter Kaufmann's noble and influential effort to counter the Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche by stressing Nietzsche's anti-political individualism and downplaying his seemingly more noxious *Kulturphilosophie.* But even after Nietzsche gave up on the idea of *German* culture as something blessed with inner truth and greatness and pregnant with the potential for renewed splendor–heaping scorn instead on the Germans and their newly-founded Reich–he still, I argue, continued to take culture, as a collective social achievement, to be something of prime importance. Indeed, it is for this reason that he took the flourishing of great individuals–especially artists and intellectuals–to be vital. Their singularity and their excellence redeems the decadent cultural landscape from the bovine blight of the "last man" and the self-satisfied, uncreative, and barren mediocrity he represents. My dissertation uses Nietzsche's perfectionistic ideal of a flourishing culture as a point of departure for investigating many of the central themes in his work: his criticism of the ideals enshrined in conventional morality; his attack on Christianity; his celebration of individual human excellence and cultural accomplishment; his lamentations about cultural decline; his troubling remarks about the need for slavery ("in some sense or other") if a society is to flourish; and his grand ambitions for a "revaluation of all values."

I begin, in Chapter 1, by discussing Nietzsche's two distinctive concepts of culture. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche describes cultures as worldviews. These worldviews come to structure a way of life, serving as a means of existential support, offering the members of a given society alluring illusions to persuade them to go on living that way of life. I go on to spell out the key differences between this

"existential" concept of culture in *The Birth of Tragedy* and Nietzsche's "collectivist" concept of culture from the *Untimely Meditations* (his second book). With his "collectivist" concept of culture, he seeks to provide a model for societies to strive for. A society becomes an exemplary collectivist culture when its way of social life takes on the characteristics of a great work of art. While it has often been recognized that Nietzsche holds out for individuals the ideal of transforming one's life into a work of art, I suggest that he has a correlative ideal for whole societies. Against the prevailing scholarly wisdom, I join ranks with a small group of interpreters who think it is wrong to read Nietzsche as giving up on culture after his early works and coming to place all his stock in isolated great individuals instead. For even at the very end of his career, Nietzsche, I argue, views not just great individuals, but entire cultures (for example, the Roman Empire—in his terms, a "work of art in the grand style") as potential bearers of value in their own right.

In Chapter 2 I consider in further detail what Nietzsche takes these exceptional individuals to be like. Although Nietzsche can sometimes give the impression that greatness is simply a matter of qualities of character––one's fortitude, nobility, pride, and so on––he regards these features as necessary and not as sufficient for greatness; it matters *what one is*, but it also matters *what one does*. In fact, these two things shade into one another. Second, I argue against Thomas Hurka and others that Nietzschean greatness is not a purely formal or dynamic ideal—simply a matter of having a certain unity among one's projects or a matter of having a strong will to power. Nietzsche's ideal of greatness is anchored in substantive evaluative considerations that go further than this, so as to assess the quality of one's projects and the ends to which one exercises one's will to power. Third, I further consider in this chapter the interdependence between great individuals and their cultural milieu. Nietzschean greatness, I claim, cannot be picked out by judging a person in complete isolation from a social backdrop. A person great in one century might not be great if transplanted to another. And a world in which everyone is great is impossible by the very concept of Nietzschean greatness.

I turn in Chapter 3 from considering individual and cultural greatness to considering individual and cultural decadence. I seek to spell out what Nietzsche means by his quasi-technical notion of "decadence." I go on to discuss the relationship that Nietzsche sees between the decadence of individuals and the decadence of whole cultures. I argue that the key relation is not aggregative: a culture is not decadent in virtue of having many decadent members, in the way a society is obese in virtue of having many obese members. Rather, the relation is one of microcosm to macrocosm: the decadent individual is structurally analogous to the decadent culture, and, by extension, the flourishing individual is structurally analogous to the flourishing culture. Conceiving of the connection in this way, I argue, suggests that a culture can flourish despite the individual decadence of most of its members. Indeed, the analogy to the individual suggests that, in Nietzschean terms, a great culture will flourish by channeling the decadence of some of its members and putting that decadence in the service of cultural accomplishment, not by trying to "exterminate" or "eliminate" these decadents.

Chapter 4 discusses Nietzsche's account of morality and its genesis. In his pejorative use of the German terms translated in English as "morality," Nietzsche has in mind not all systems of ethical evaluation, but a particular family of normative systems, which start to rise in social prominence in the long span of time between the birth of Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire. Though initially bound up with Christianity, this morality, as Nietzsche conceives it, later comes to branch into various more secularized forms. I discuss the key features of this morality, and then I turn to consider Nietzsche's allegorical narrative of its genesis. The "slave revolt," which Nietzsche sees as bringing this morality into existence, is, on my reading, the handiwork not of "the slaves" themselves, but of the "priestly people." They foment the slave revolt and goad their hapless sheep the slaves, and indeed "the nobles" as well, into accepting this new moral value system. In addition to considering the pretensions to historical accuracy and claims to philosophical importance of Nietzsche's genealogy, I ask why, according to Nietzsche, slaves and, more curiously, the nobles are drawn to this new value system, as well as why the "priestly people" engineer this revolt in the first place.

In Chapter 5 I consider the grounds on which Nietzsche takes Judeo-Christian morality to task. I begin by considering and rejecting two common interpretations—first, that Nietzsche thinks that morality has become defunct as a result of the "death of God," and second, that Nietzsche trafficks in the genetic fallacy of reaching a conclusion about morality's normative standing from facts about its (alleged) origins. I then consider the more challenging and plausible interpretation that Nietzsche attacks morality because of its stultifying effects on human excellence and creativity. As I point out, living in accordance with Judeo-Christian morality, according to Nietzsche, can have and has had *both bad and good* effects on excellence and creativity. His opposition to morality, I suggest, is best seen as more theoretical than practical in spirit: morality, for him, is a tissue of lies that enshrines what by his lights are deeply objectionable values, ideals, and attitudes. Their objectionable character is independent of the mixed bag of consequences they engender.

In Chapter 6 I treat the difficult question of the meta-axiological grounding of Nietzsche's perfectionistic values, in the service of which he criticizes morality. Does Nietzsche, I ask, regard his perfectionistic valorization of cultural flourishing over other ideals (such as "the green pasture happiness of the herd") to have genuine evaluative privilege? My interpretation cuts against the grain of much of the best recent scholarship on Nietzsche, which sees him as doubtful that any values, including his own, might have privileged standing. For this reason the approach I take in this chapter is primarily negative in character: I try to undermine the basis for thinking that Nietzsche pulls the rug out from under his perfectionistic value commitments. The arguments for blanket value skepticism that have been attributed to Nietzsche, arguments that would undermine the pretensions of any values to enjoy meta-axiological privilege, are simply not anchored in decisive textual evidence.

In the final chapter, Chapter 7, I investigate Nietzsche's troubling remarks about slavery. He appears to praise a world in which a small elite enhances itself through the subjugation of the rest of mankind, who bear this yoke of servitude and get nothing in return. The assumption undergirding this interpretation is a natural one: namely, that whatever benefits it may bring to an elite, whatever cultural

achievements it may make possible, slavery is not in the interest of the slaves themselves. But this assumption, I shall argue, is not one that Nietzsche himself shares. Nietzsche, on the contrary, argues that it is *in being slaves* ("in some sense or other" [BGE, 257] anyway) that most people have their highest calling. The best sort of life is one in which a person participates in a flourishing culture, even just by making a lowly contribution–whether lugging the stones to build the cathedral or sweeping Beethoven's floor. For this is what truly ennobles a person and, according to Nietzsche, grants his or her life its highest worth and dignity. Although Nietzsche is hostile to the idea of innate human dignity and its egalitarian trappings enshrined in Christianity and Kantianism, he offers his own revisionary conception of human dignity–a respect merited by what one is able to accomplish and thus possessed in radically different degrees by different people. In developing this Nietzschean picture of authentic human dignity, I thereby question the prominent interpretation that Nietzsche sees morality as an ideology in the interests of the slaves (and of "the weak" more generally). Whatever comforting illusions it affords and meretricious benefits it brings, morality, on my reading of Nietzsche, is an ideology that praises a form of life that it is actually in the interest of no one.

Far from being a writer of inspired, if disconnected aphoristic observations, Nietzsche, on the interpretation I give, had a unifying theme running through the corpus of his work. Far from being a nihilist who thought that with the "death of God" all value collapses, Nietzsche, on my reading, had deep-seated value commitments of his own. He had a positive vision of the good and of human flourishing. But unlike nearly all thinkers before and since, Nietzsche valorized the achievements of culture, particularly achievements in the arts, even when these must come at the expense of morality and justice. Few will want to follow Nietzsche to the extreme position he staked out. But he can all the same serve as an antidote to thinking that the only indispensable values for human life are those of morality and justice. Nietzsche forcefully reminds us that a world of cultural barrenness, however just and morally perfect it may be, is seriously lacking. It is lacking not just because it fails to have enough diverting artistic entertainment or intellectual stimulation for its members. It is lacking because the

humans who live there have squandered their potential to make something great of themselves in the realm of the spirit. And that is something we can in good conscience regret.

Chapter 1:
Two Concepts of Culture

I. Introduction

The decadence and flourishing of culture is one of Nietzsche's paramount philosophical concerns throughout his career. But what does he mean by "culture" [*Kultur / Cultur*], when conceiving of it as something whose flourishing it makes sense to care deeply about?[1] What sort of entity does he have in mind? In common English parlance, the term "culture" is richly multifarious: We have high culture, the sphere of the opera house and the art museum. We also have pop culture–the latest episode of *Gossip Girl* or the current hit of Katy Perry. Outside the realm of the arts, high and low, the term "culture" signifies a wider network of social practices: The Japanese have a culture where a polite person slurps her noodles, and they had one of samurais and seppuku. In this anthropological sense, the term "culture" refers to various practices characteristic of a given place at a particular period in history– the eating habits, social roles, marriage customs, burial rites, traditional festivals–of the sort that might be described and interpreted by an ethnographer. When it comes to the freighted German term "*Kultur*" as well, there are countless other connotations, the discussion of which would fill several dissertations.[2]

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[1] Nietzsche, in general, uses a "C" to spell "*Cultur*" instead of the more standard and contemporary spelling "*Kultur*"–with the exception of the first essay of the *Untimely Meditations* and a few other places. One reason may be that he is following Jacob Burckhardt, one of his colleagues at the University of Basel, whose *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (typically translated in English as *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*) was published in 1860. My suspicion is that Nietzsche is attracted by the Latinate root of "Cultur" and wants to call attention to that through the spelling. A human "culture" is what we get from the highest "cultivation" of humanity. For Nietzsche's description of culture as the "new and improved physis," see UM, II:10. (Cf., also, UM, III:1,3.) As Kopp (1974) notes, "Der ursprüngliche Sinn des lateinischen Wortes 'cultura' lag nicht im Schöpferischen schlechthin, sondern im Begriff des Pflegens, der Bedeutung des Verbums 'colere.' Cultura hieß wie jede Pflege Weitergestaltung eines Vorhandenen...," p. 2 [Punctuation slightly altered]. [It was not creativity *per se* that underlay the original sense of the Latin word "cultura." Rather, it was the concept of cultivation, the meaning of the verb "colere." Cultura, like every cultivation, is the further shaping of some pre-existing thing.]

[2] Geuss (1999c) provides a good, short discussion of the complexities of this rich term. See also Elias (1978), esp. p. 5-11, on the charged distinction between "*Kultur*" and "*Zivilization*." See Blondel (1986), p. 53-4 for further discussion.

Although Nietzsche shares many of the common ways of using this German term and its English cognate, he also has two more specific notions of what a culture is–notions that he develops in his first two books, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872] and the *Untimely Meditations* [essays written 1873-1876]. As we shall see, these Nietzschean senses of culture overlap in important ways with the more colloquial understanding of culture as something distinctive of the way of life of a certain group of people and as intimately bound up with their social and artistic practices. These two Nietzschean senses of culture share also the weighty seriousness of the German "*Kultur.*" Yet since these two concepts of culture are distinctive–if not unique–to Nietzsche, we need to look at just what specifically he has in mind.

The concept of culture that Nietzsche presents in *The Birth of Tragedy* is one that looks upon a culture as something marked by its functional role: it is a worldview seeking to provide people with a form of existential sustenance. Such a culture gets borne out in works of art, or in variety of social practices, which thereby advance this particular worldview. A culture, in this sense of a worldview realized in art and social practices, flourishes when it is successful in providing the sort of support its society needs. It declines when it ceases to be successful at this end. Let us call this the *existential* conception of culture.

Yet already in *The Birth of Tragedy* as well, Nietzsche gestures at a second way of conceiving of a culture, which he develops further in the *Untimely Meditations*. It is anchored in the *theatrum mundi* theme that is so central in *The Birth*. This is the idea that human existence and the world can be fruitfully compared to a spectacle, unconsciously produced, for the entertainment of a cosmic spectator. On this conception, a culture is the collective life of a people, considered as an aesthetic phenomenon itself. The culture is thus like a performance

piece of which the participants are largely unaware. The standards of the culture's flourishing and of its decadence are a function of the art-like status of this collective entity itself. Though others have noted that Nietzsche held out such an ideal for individuals, with their lives being similar to great works of art, I suggest that he has a correlative ideal for whole cultures.[3] So long as the culture remains akin to a great work of art, it flourishes. When it ceases to be akin, it declines. Let us call this the *collectivist* conception of culture.[4] The first aim of the chapter will be to explore these two Nietzschean conceptions of culture, as presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations*. Cultural flourishing, in the relevant Nietzschean senses, is not *just* a matter of having a considerable quantity of great art and not *just* a matter of the ascendancy and persistence of any distinctive set of social practices.[5] It is something more subtle and specific in both cases.

In the later part of the chapter, I take up the question of the extent to which emphasis on the collectivist form of culture persists into Nietzsche's mature philosophy. It is fairly uncontroversial that Nietzsche remains concerned with cultures as means of existential sustenance. He grows particularly worried by the impending threat of nihilism that he thinks is imminent with the collapse of a certain Christian-moral worldview in the wake of the "death of God." He wants to champion a life-affirming, Dionysian worldview in its stead, at least for those well-constituted enough to handle it. (And, for "the herd," he is happy that consoling illusions

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[3] On the affinity between artworks and individuals, see Nehamas (1985), Ch. 6; Ridley (2007), p. 84-88.

[4] Nietzsche's interest, to be sure, is never in saying that culture really is a worldview, or really is a collective, or really is something else. That sort of identification is beside the point. His interest is instead to illuminate why, when it comes to these two things he calls "culture," the flourishing of those things should be of great concern.

[5] There is one natural way of understanding *the flourishing* of culture, where culture is an entity in the latter vein. This is the sense in which certain sects of Orthodox Judaism, for example, count as flourishing cultures, since their way of life manages to persist in the face of encroaching modernity, in the way in which the culture of many Native American tribes, by contrast, did not manage to survive. See Margalit and Halbertal (1994) and Lear (2006) respectively. This is not the sense of culture that Nietzsche has in mind in taking it to be an entity whose flourishing it is worth caring about.

continue to be regnant.) I will not in this chapter be dwelling on these issues surrounding Nietzsche's later views about cultures as means of existential sustenance, since they have already been ably discussed, if not in quite the terms in which I have framed things here.[6] What I will be considering instead is whether the collectivist form of culture also remains an important concern throughout Nietzsche's career. I will argue that it does, and I thus seek to establish the continuity between *The Untimely Meditations* and Nietzsche's later work. In texts from *The Gay Science* [1882] to *The Antichrist* [1888] we see Nietzsche's concern for cultures, as collective art-like entities, persisting.

By pressing this interpretation, I hope to temper a widespread individualist interpretation of Nietzsche, which sees him as turning away from collectivist concerns in his later work. According to this individualist school of interpretation, Nietzsche in his mature work cares, if not just about his own self-fashioning, then first and foremost about the flourishing of a few great individuals–Goethe, Napoleon, Beethoven, and people of that ilk, in whose exalted ranks Nietzsche would also count himself.[7] The great man in this respect is thought an island unto himself–or else part of a small and isolated archipelago (albeit supported

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[6] Reginster (2006); See also the discussion in Stegmaier (2004), esp. p. 159.

[7] Walter Kaufmann, for example, describes the "leitmotif of Nietzsche's life and thought" as "the theme of the antipolitical individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern world." See Kaufmann (1950), p. 418. Contemporary readers of Nietzsche as different as Nehamas (1985) and Leiter (2002) are united in this individualist approach. The prevailing sentiment about Nietzsche's trajectory in the anglophone secondary philosophical literature is that he moves from a concern with culture (in *The Birth of Tragedy*) to a concern with the promotion of a few choice individuals (starting as early as the *Untimely Meditations* but continuing throughout his mature work). As we shall see in what follows, there is some truth to this individualist reading, but I will draw attention to the some of the respects in which the broader culture remains important in Nietzsche's later work and stress themes this individualist orientation can lead one to neglect. Notable exceptions to the individualist interpretive trend are Young (2006) and Havas (1995). Both Young and Havas construe cultures as communities united by a shared self-understanding. I am myself less sure that Nietzsche remains interested after *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* in promoting culture in this sense; I seek to highlight other senses in which cultural themes remain prominent in his work. More recently, Jonathan Cohen, in a focused investigation of *Human, All too Human* (the next book Nietzsche writes after the *Untimely Meditations*), has persuasively drawn attention to the important continuity between this book and Nietzsche's first two works. See Cohen (2010).

by the labor of the slaves on the mainland). For what ultimately matters is these great individuals, not the cultures that surround them, except insofar as these cultures prove a help or a hindrance to this project of self-realization on the part of the few. Or so the individualist reading would have it.

Nietzsche, to be sure, does care very much about great individuals. But this line of individualist interpretation underestimates the central place that culture, as a collective entity of importance in its own right, continues to occupy in Nietzsche's later thought. Of course, even the individualist readings would concede that Nietzsche is to some extent a socio-cultural thinker–diagnosing social ills, so as to protect nascent great individuals from these noxious influences, or charting how social arrangements and cultural forces might be manipulated so as to be to the great individual's personal advantage. But I here sketch a dimension of Nietzsche's thought that goes well beyond these instrumental concerns. Cultures, in the collectivist sense, matter not just in threatening (and sometimes promoting) the great individual's flourishing, but as ends in themselves, which, by their very existence, can manifest a form of *collective* human excellence, and which can exemplify the right sort of Nietzschean noble ideals.

II. *The Birth of Tragedy*: The Existential Conception of Culture

The Birth of Tragedy strikes many of its readers as rather a farrago: an incautious philological treatise combined with some inspired philosophical speculations–with an effusive celebration of Richard Wagner and music drama tacked on at the end. However, we must bear in mind that Nietzsche's paean to Wagner, more than simply being a vestigial limb, is integral to the theme of the work as a whole. Nietzsche's central concern–philological and philosophical–is

with the decadence and flourishing of cultures, and he at this point takes Wagner to be the great hope for the rejuvenation of decadent modern culture, a culture which he thinks has been in decline since Socrates.[8] What sort of thing, though, does Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* take a culture to be? And what valuable role does he see these sorts of cultures as playing in human life and society?

"Cultures," in the main sense in which Nietzsche uses that term in *The Birth of Tragedy*, are worldviews which suffuse a whole way of life. Nietzsche concerns himself with 4 main cultures: the Apolline, the Dionysiac, the Tragic (a hybrid of the previous two) and the Socratic (or Alexandrian).[9] These worldviews are not only expressed in the products of society (that is, in works of art, rituals, and practices associated with these societies), but are also, in turn, fostered by these very products. The most important unifying thread in Nietzsche's discussion is that all of these cultures serve as ways for human beings to cope with existence.[10] These cultures, in a quite literal sense, play a vital role in making it possible for humans to go on living.

Nietzsche, despite his later praise for life affirmation, was at this point under the sway of Schopenhauer's extreme pessimism.[11] Early in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he cites the advice of Silenus offered to King Midas: "the very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon" (BT, 3). The

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[8] See Geuss (1999e), p. x.

[9] Some take there to be only 3 kinds of culture- Apolline, Dionysiac, and Socratic. See Young (2006). As I spell out in what follows, tragic culture should not be equated with Dionysiac culture *per se*, as Young does. Tragic culture draws on elements from both the Dionsyian and the Apolline, thus producing a hybrid form. (There are some exegetical complexities here (for Young and for me), particularly surrounding BT, 18, which I discuss in what follows.)

[10] As Tanner (1994) writes: "Nietzsche's fundamental concern throughout his life was to plot the relationship between suffering and culture, or cultures. He categorizes and grades cultures by the way in which they have coped with the omnipresence of suffering, and assesses moralities by the same criterion," p. 30.

[11] Nietzsche's notebooks reveal that he was skeptical of some of Schopenhauer's most important metaphysical claims. See his unpublished piece, "On Schopenhauer," included in Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, Nehamas and Geuss (ed.) (2009), p. 1-8. But at this point, Nietzsche basically endorses Schopenhauer's pessimism.

young Nietzsche at this point agrees with Schopenhauer that suffering is omnipresent, and he also agrees with Schopenhauer that our lives *as human beings* are not worth living. We need illusions to seduce us into carrying on with life, and culture, he thinks, serves to furnish us with these life-preserving illusions. Nietzsche traces the transformations of culture in ancient Greek society as a way of understanding the different ways the Greeks were able to cope with suffering. I'll now briefly discuss each of these cultures.

Apolline culture perhaps is best understood through Nietzsche's pregnant image of the veil (BT, 2):[12] On the one hand, a veil *prevents* us from seeing things, keeping them hidden from view under it folds. This is vital, for if we were to face the horrible truth about existence unvarnished, we would be paralyzed (BT, 7). And so we need the veil's protective function in order to go on living in blissful ignorance of what lies beneath. Yet in addition the veil's surface is *itself* an object of aesthetic contemplation. Because it is so radiantly alluring, we stick around *just for its sake*. It is, as Nietzsche says, a wonderful dream, so wonderful that we do not want to awake from it (BT, 4). The characteristic artistic products of Apolline culture are possessed of a reassuring surface order and beauty (as in a Doric column or a perfectly chiseled statue) that mask over (or "veil") the fundamental horror that is the true character of life.

It is out of this Apolline pleasure in the sensuous that Nietzsche thinks the Olympian gods arise.[13] Yet they act as more than just a beautiful veil. They provide, in the radiant lives they lead, a kind of *justification* of human life. In the form they take in epic poetry and sculpture, they are far from the intellectualized vaporousness of the Prime Mover. They instead are earthily

[12] An interesting discussion of Nietzsche's veil imagery–particularly how it changes from *The Birth of Tragedy* to his later work, can be found in Reginster (Forthcoming).

[13] The gods, as Nietzsche stresses, are the contingent development of a particular historical society: "...[U]nder the influence of the Apolline instinct for beauty, the Olympian divine order of joy developed out of the original, Titanic divine order of terror in a series of slow transitions, in much the same way as roses burst forth from a thicket of thorns" (BT, 3).

corporeal–in fact, "mirror images" of human beings, albeit with a great deal of idealization (BT, 3). Whereas Christianity would hold that humans are made in the image of God, Nietzsche wants to reverse things and to suggest that the Olympian gods are *made in the image of humans*. And, bearing in mind that the point of culture is to give us the resources to cope with suffering, we see that there is an important *cultural* reason for this. Because the gods are thought to live and enjoy something very similar to human life, human life by extension is made to seem worth living. Apolline culture is concerned to trump up an inferior product called "life" with an appealing, if misleading, celebrity endorsement by the Olympians. "Thus gods," as Nietzsche says, "justify the life of men by living it themselves – the only satisfactory theodicy!" (BT, 3).

Yet this seeming "justification" of life, we must remember, is at base illusory.[14] (This will be a recurring theme when it comes to each of the cultures discussed.) The gods are a fiction, a clever ruse by life to get its creatures to go on living.[15] Since we do not have a life that is *actually* worth living, we need culture, and its productions, to delude us into thinking that life is so.

While Apolline culture is best understood through the idea of the veil, Dionysiac culture is best understood through the idea of *Rausch*, an untranslatable word that captures a sort of frenzied intoxication that involves the loss of one's individual identity. Dionysiac culture is

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[14] "Art and Theodicy" in Geuss (1999d), p. 105.

[15] It is important to stress that at the deepest level, Nietzsche does not see humans as *inventing* culture as a kind of solution to their woes. Life (or "the will") brings culture into being for *its own* purposes, to entice humans to go on living. (BT, 18). This section (18) of *The Birth of Tragedy* may, however, seem to pose a problem for the reading I am developing here. For in this passage, Nietzsche seems to change course, and to argue, contrary to what he has so far claimed, that there are only three primitive elements when it comes to culture, and these are the Socratic, artistic and tragic worldviews. He goes on to say that *Buddhism* exemplifies tragic culture, its "tragic" wisdom being to remind us that "life flows on indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances" (BT, 18). But this, while in certain respects similar, is importantly different from the aestheticist consolation Nietzsche has thus far claimed is distinctive of tragedy–namely, showing us the horrors of the world in such a way so that they seem justified as aesthetic phenomena. Why is he now seeming to undermine his own proposal about tragic culture? As so often in this text, he is trying, I think, to develop his own new ideas, while keeping Wagner appeased. I suspect he, whether consciously or not, is pandering to Wagner here, by downplaying the very serious extent to which his own views were diverging from those of Wagner's idols–Schopenhauer and the Buddha–and by emphasizing the best point of similarity he can find.

organized around the orgiastic festival, lubricated with extreme drunkeness. Keeping our fundamental question in the background, how, we might ask, does Dionysiac culture provide existential solace? First, it enables the loss of individuality. Because much of our suffering, on Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's view, springs from the fact that we are "individuated" human beings, with constantly frustrated desires, we can take solace in the loss of that individuality and the attendant loss of personal desires. In this bacchanalia of inebriation and sexual licentiousness, we forget our everyday woes by forgetting our everyday selves. Second, Dionysiac culture provides an outlet for pent-up energy, sexual and otherwise, where the "very wildest of nature's beasts" can be unleashed (BT, 2). Since, on Schopenhauer's view, suffering is bound up with the perpetual dissatisfaction of these sorts of drives, when we discharge them, we thereby lessen our propensity to suffer.[16] [17]

As happens with the simplistic, escapist variety of Apolline culture (in the form of the veil) when it is transfigured into the Olympian gods, the underlying impulse in Dionysiac culture gets taken up by the Greeks and transformed and reinterpreted into something far more

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[16] Nietzsche suggests that the Dionysiac festival comes into Greece by way of the Asiatic barbarian tribes. In its most primitive Babylonian version, humans "regressed to the condition of tigers and monkeys" (BT, 2).

[17] There are times at which Nietzsche seems to be conceiving of the Dionysiac not as a culture *per se*, but as the antithesis to the "lie" of culture (BT, 8). He sometimes even wants to take the Dionysiac to be *so* primal that it is a metaphysical category like, or perhaps equivalent to, the Schopenhauerian noumenal will. (But this is in tension with other points he makes: the Dionysiac practices he refers to–the dithyrhamb, the festivals of Dionysus, etc.–would seem to be themselves human social practices, far from being the antithesis to culture; and furthermore, in his notebooks he has already raised serious doubts about the coherence of the Schopenhauerian noumenal.) Similarly, Nietzsche sometimes speaks of the Dionysiac truth that is conveyed through tragedy as if it were coming via a sort of "mouthpiece of the 'in itself' of things, a telephone from the beyond," (GM, III:5) to use a charge he later hurls at Wagner. To the extent that Nietzsche gives this impression (as I think he often does) we would do well to focus on the fact that there is a more *mundane* sort of Dionysiac truth, separable from these metaphysical underpinnings, that tragedy for Nietzsche can and does express in the stories it presents: This is the truth that arbitrary suffering is an omnipresent feature of life. One of the main puzzles for Nietzsche is why this truth would be at all consoling–why, in other words, do people seek out tragedy? His answer is that tragedy presents this truth in such a way that it becomes not just bearable, but attractive.

sophisticated–something with the capacity not just to give us a brief respite from suffering, but to make suffering *aesthetically pleasurable*.

Nietzsche's idea is not wholly clear, but we can best understand what he is getting at if we focus on his remark that medicines are often like deadly poisons (BT, 2). The Dionysiac festival is best thought of as a kind of *inoculation*. We get a etiolated dose of the terrible to immunize us against its horrors. The Dionysiac festival, to this end, reenacts in a symbolic way what happens in nature all the time. *The individual is crushed*. In participating in the Dionysiac rites, we can experience in a relatively safe environment that which we most fear, yet in such a way that it becomes pleasurable. "Here for the first time the jubilation of nature achieves expression as art, here for the first time the tearing apart of the *principium individuationis* becomes an artistic phenomenon" (BT, 2). Why should this be comforting? It is because in our ecstasy we are dissociated from our individual concerns, and we no longer fear our own destruction. In fact, Nietzsche thinks, we briefly identify ourselves with the form-giving, form-destroying, artistically creative powers in nature. It is from *their* perspective that existence first comes to seem justified as an aesthetic phenomenon (BT, 5). With this change in view, we can take aesthetic pleasure in our own symbolic destruction.

These two cultural strands, as we have seen, provide ways of coping with suffering. They reach their ideal synthesis in Greek tragedy, a form which draws on elements of both worldviews. Let me highlight briefly those that are most relevant: The Apolline impulse, as we saw, involves a protective veil and culminates in a "theodicy," in Nietzsche's idiosyncratically pagan understanding of that concept, where it means something like a justification of life. The Dionysiac impulse, as we saw as well, permits the loss of our individuated identity and

culminates in the ability to look upon suffering, dismemberment, and destruction as aesthetic phenomena. Tragic culture fuses these strands: Tragedy offers us a theodicy of sorts because it allows us temporarily to adopt a godly perspective from which suffering is justified as an aesthetic spectacle for the gods. It is because we have lost our individuated identity, courtesy of the Dionysiac element, that we can take up this godly perspective. And it is because of the beautiful Apolline veil with which tragedy surrounds the terrible events it depicts, that we are (a) saved from the paralysis that would come were we to face the cruel truth about life unvarnished, and further, (b) invited to look upon those terrible events as aesthetic phenomena.[18]

How does all this work? As tragic spectators in the theater, we forget our individuated identities and "identify" ourselves with the chorus. Since in the tragedy the events onstage are supposed to be the *invention* of the chorus for its own entertainment, we are in effect identifying ourselves with a kind of artistically creative entity that takes aesthetic pleasure in the creation and destruction of human beings. (Elsewhere, Nietzsche compares this entity to an "artist-god" (BT, "Attempt," 5) or, in an image from Heraclitus, to a child building sand creations on the beach and knocking them over for fun (BT, 24)). It is from this choral/ artist-godly/ playful child *perspective* that we can see the suffering on stage as an aesthetic spectacle. While such suffering may not be justified on moral grounds, it is, at least from this perspective, justified as an aesthetic phenomenon:

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[18] Whereas in its primitive form, the veil is an opaque covering, hiding the cruel truth from view, it becomes, if we continue with the image, a partly translucent protective covering, through which the truth about life can emerge in a bearable form. This I take to be the implication of Section 21. The relevant "veil" is myth.

> For what must be clear to us above all, both to our humiliation *and* our elevation, is that the whole comedy of art is certainly not performed for us, neither for our edification nor our education, just as we are far from truly being the creators of that world of art; conversely, however, we may very well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art, and that our highest dignity [*Würde*] lies in our significance as works of art– for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified* – although our awareness of our significance in this respect hardly differs from the awareness which painted soldiers have of the battle depicted on the same canvas (BT, 5).

Tragedy thus arms us with consolation in the face of suffering. Though ultimately illusory, this tragic solace enables Greek society to flourish; its people are armed with a way of facing life, despite its horrors, and wanting to go on living.[19]

Yet this sort of comfort, Nietzsche thinks, gets destroyed at the hands of Socrates. In his zeal to make the world intelligible, he destroys tragedy and the aesthetic consolation it offers, and thus dooms Greek society.[20] The proximate cause, as it were, of this decline is that with Euripides, tragedy as a genre comes to be infected by Socratism, and the true spirit of tragic culture dies out. Tragedy can no longer offer the existential consolation that Nietzsche takes to be its best function; it attempts instead to make the horrors of the world intelligible and thus to offer a rational response to suffering.

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[19]One of the central themes of Nietzsche's early work is that one can survive only in the face of thoroughgoing illusions. One of the puzzling features is that we often on some level know these illusions *are* illusions and yet are still consoled by them even so. (Hence it is not simply a form of deception pure and simple.).

[20] In Nietzsche's later work, the explanations tend to go the other way: it was because Greek society grew decadent that it found Socratism appealing.

It important to bear in mind that Socratic culture (or Alexandrian culture, as Nietzsche also calls it), like the three cultures I have described, is itself founded on an illusion, or really, on two interconnected illusions. First, Socrates, by Nietzsche's lights, has faith that the depths of nature can be grasped–in essence, that human reason can understand everything. Socrates is thus deluded about the *epistemic power* of reason; primordial nature, according to Nietzsche, ultimately is mysterious, utterly beyond human rational explanation or comprehension.[21] Second, Socrates has faith in the *value* of reason. He takes reason to be a kind of panacea, the route, by way of knowledge and virtue, to happiness. (BT, 14-15). The goal of Socratic rationalism (which Nietzsche calls "science") is "to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified" (BT, 15). Socrates destroys tragedy because the spirit of Socratism comes to supplant the spirit of tragic wisdom, according to which a terrible fate could befall a human being for no reason at all. Socratism would have it that there *must* be a reason, since the world is rational.

But, as much as Socratism pretends to be the truth, this faith in rationality is a consoling illusion as well. The problem with Socratic culture is *not* that it is founded on an illusion. It is rather that tragic culture, in excluding the Dionysiac truth about existence entirely–the truth that life is characterized by utterly arbitrary suffering–rests on a fundamentally *unstable* sort of illusion.[22] The Dionysiac truth about life, Nietzsche thinks, cannot be suppressed from view entirely; it must be acknowledged and dealt with. Tragic culture offers the ideal existential

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[21] Whether this means it has *no* nature to be comprehended, or *has a nature* that we can't comprehend, is another matter. In BT 18, he seems to be endorsing the idea of a noumenal realm of which we are ignorant. In his notebooks, he is skeptical of the idea of a noumenal. See note 11 above.

[22] The same is true of the Apolline and Dionysiac in their unmixed forms. The Apolline, in its simple form as the opaque veil, like the Socratic, refuses to admit the Dionysiac truth, and thus proves untenable in the long term, since this truth is bound to rear its head. The Dionysiac, in its unvarnished form, will prove untenable in the long term because it will destroy us. (See BT, 21, for example).

response to suffering because it reveals the inevitable (this truth) but does so with the aid of enough illusions that it becomes not just bearable, but palatable.[23] When tragedy as a genre declines with Euripides–thus coming no longer to be animated by tragic wisdom but by Socratic precepts instead–Greek society follows in tow.

Tragic culture is what Nietzsche hopes will be reborn in the music drama of Richard Wagner, who, as I have mentioned, Nietzsche takes to be the rejuvenating force for German society more generally. Wagner, in his vision of Bayreuth, hoped to create a new communal festival, akin in its social function to the ancient Athenian festivals: "We must," as Nietzsche says, "remember the enormous power of *tragedy* to stimulate, purify, and discharge the entire life of the people. We shall never comprehend the supreme value of tragedy until, like the Greeks, we experience it as the essence of all prophylactic healing energies, as a mediator between the strongest and inherently most fateful qualities of a people" (BT, 21).

Yet even though the tragic festival is in some sense a communal experience, and even though these worldviews pervade a society at large, we should bear in mind that the primary *efficacy* of these cultural "stimulants to life" is *at the individual level*.[24] In the story that Nietzsche tells, cultures provide existential solace *to their individual participants* by providing them

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[23] As Tanner, in his "Introduction" to *The Birth of Tragedy* (1992) aptly puts it, "Art, at its greatest, tells the truth and makes it possible to bear it," p. xxix.

[24] This is contrary to the way Nietzsche is usually interpreted. It is typically thought that he moves from a focus on (German) culture in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* to a focus on (select) individuals in the later work. I instead take him to move from a primary focus in the early published work on individuals (with culture of importance merely derivatively, as an aid to *their* flourishing) to a focus on culture as a kind of superlative artistic accomplishment, of independent value in its own right, whose value gives objective meaning to the lives of the individuals who participate in it.

illusions that they need in order to survive.[25] A society becomes dangerously decadent when it cannot provide it members with this comfort.

III. The *Untimely Meditations* and Beyond: The Collectivist Conception of Culture

One of Nietzsche's key themes in *The Birth of Tragedy* is that the world, when viewed from a certain perspective, can be looked upon as if it were a work of art (BT, 5). It is here, I think, that the germ of Nietzsche's later collectivist conception of culture is to be found. This idea, though foreshadowed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, gets its clearest and most succinct formulation in Nietzsche's "David Strauss" essay in the *Untimely Meditations*. Here Nietzsche defines "culture" (in some valorized sense, where being a culture is a success concept) as "above all, unity of artistic style in all the life expressions of a people" (UM, I:1). As he goes on to clarify in the next section, this unity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being a genuine culture, since even an "inferior and degenerate" pseudo-culture can have this unity (UM, I:2). It matters *what* is unified. The genuine culture is thus going to need to have other virtues in addition to just unity.

So what are these other virtues indicative of flourishing? The culture's flourishing is not *simply* a function of the society's artistic output (theater pieces, musical and literary works, buildings), though societies where artistic achievement is at a qualitative peak have that as a mark in their favor. A culture's flourishing is due, more broadly, to the stylistic excellence to be found in '*all* the life expressions of a people' [*allen Lebensäusserungen eines Volkes*] (UM, I:1;

[25] Of course, in his later work, Nietzsche maintains that most (perhaps all) people need illusion, in greater or lesser degrees, to survive. This commitment he never loses: Christianity is one of the main sources of these illusions. The question is whether he thinks there is some value to culture beyond simply affording these life-preserving illusions. I think in the later work he holds that there is: Culture changes to become valuable for its own sake.

emphasis mine). That presumably would include more conventional artistic productions, but would also go beyond it, to encompass the whole way of life, and its characteristic rituals, practices, modes of comportment, and so on. It as if Nietzsche is thinking of the culture as a massive piece of performance art, to a large degree unconsciously produced by the members of a given society. It is *that collective entity* that he is assessing for the style it manifests.

Nietzsche's aestheticizing imagery should not mislead us into thinking that this excellence is purely an aesthetic property of these life expressions, as if their vocalizations were particularly mellifluous or their modes of moving around were particularly graceful, like the high notes of a tenor or the steps of a pirouetting dancer. Just as we can assess works of art not just on narrowly aesthetic grounds (as beautiful or not beautiful), but on broadly ethical grounds (as, say, objectionably life-negating, as Nietzsche complains about *Parsifal)*, so too Nietzsche is assessing cultures, viewed as works of art, though this sort of broad ethical lens. The issue for him is not a purely aesthetic one, but instead what ideals the whole form of life *expresses*. The great culture–which is to say, the only thing deserving of the appellation "culture" in Nietzsche's valorized sense–is one that manifests *noble* ideals in its whole form of life.

Here we find in a transformed shape Nietzsche's earlier worldview idea of culture, now folded in an interesting way into the collectivist idea of culture. Whereas his previous concern was with the existential sustenance that cultural worldviews provided to members of the society, now he becomes concerned with the expressive character of a culture itself. It is a constitutive demerit of a culture, viewed as a collectivist work of art, when its dominant worldview is objectionable. Compare what one might say about more conventional works of art: The *Illiad* expresses a noble outlook, according to which it is better to die a hero than to live as a nobody.

Parsifal (on Nietzsche's reading of it) gives voice to a perverse sort of anti-sensuality and world-weariness. Nietzsche carries over this same style of criticism to whole cultures. The best cultures are more in the vein of the *Illiad* than in that of *Parsifal* in terms of the sorts of ideals that their way of life expresses.

Note the exalted terms in which he describes the Roman Empire as an entity in its own right: it is "[t]hat which stood there *aere perennius*, the *imperium Romanum*, the most magnificent form of organization under difficult circumstances which has yet been achieved, in comparison with which all before and all afterward are mere botch [*Stumperei*], patchwork [*Stückwerk*], and dilettantism' (A, 58). Nietzsche would seem to be finding a kind of highly admirable unity and splendor in the Roman Empire itself.

His gravid imagery continues in this spirit with artistic and architectural metaphors:

> The *imperium Romanum*...this most admirable work of art in the grand style was a beginning; its construction was designed to prove itself through thousands of years: until today nobody has built again like this, nobody has even dreamed of building in such proportions *sub specie aeterni*. The organization was firm enough to withstand bad emperors: the accident of persons may not have anything to do with such matters–first principle of all grand architecture (A, 58).

The magnificence that Nietzsche calls "the grand style" is neither confined to the arts, nor underwritten by aesthetic features alone. He writes: "Greeks! Romans! The nobility of instinct, the taste, the methodical research, the genius of organization and administration, the

faith in, the *will* to, man's future, the great Yes to all things, become visible in the *imperium Romanum*, visible for all the senses, the grand style no longer mere art but become reality, truth, life" (A, 59). In a flourishing culture, a certain style comes to animate the form of life of a whole people, and this style is the sensuous embodiment ("visible for all the senses") of certain noble ideals ("the great Yes to all things") which themselves are not simply aesthetic, but ethical.

Nietzsche certainly takes Christianity and Judeo-Christian morality to task for being inimical to individual human greatness. But even in his final works of 1888, when, according to the individualist reading, his concerns are with the flourishing of a few great individuals, Nietzsche, we must not forget, lambasts Christianity and morality for being inimical to cultural greatness, in the collectivist sense just described. Not just the fate of a few choice individuals, but also the fate of whole cultures matters to Nietzsche. Lamenting the fall of the Roman Empire, he writes that it was "not buried overnight by a natural catastrophe, not trampled down by Teutons and other buffaloes, but ruined by cunning, stealthy, invisible, anemic vampires," namely the early Christians (A, 59). At its height, the Roman Empire manifested a certain worldview. With the rise of Christianity, a different worldview gets manifested, one that Nietzsche regards as repugnant. The ruination of the Roman Empire is not a purely downstream causal matter. The problem is not simply bad things (though there are many) that follow from Christianity's rise to power, which thereby *lead to* the decline of Roman greatness, as cause to effect. It is instead, to an important extent, the unfortunate fact of Christianity's ascendancy itself. The problem with this ascendancy is that the noble, pagan ideals of the Romans get displaced by Christian, moral ideals. Once a few centuries go by, and Christianity gains this

foothold, Roman greatness crumbles, and the Pantheon becomes filled with statues not of the Roman gods, but of the Virgin Mary.

An important thing to notice here is that Nietzsche's emphasis is not–or at least not obviously–on the culture as simply an instrumental precondition to promote the rise of independent great individuals. To be sure, Nietzsche does suggest that the rise of Christianity–on which he blames the downfall of the Roman Empire–stymies the flourishing of "those valuable, those virile, noble natures" (A, 58). But these are not simply self-involved, self-cultivating individuals, unconcerned with the culture of which they are a part. Far from it; they are those who, as Nietzsche says, find "their own cause, their own seriousness, their own pride in the cause of Rome" (A, 59). (Julius Caesar is, unsurprisingly, one of his favorite Romans [TI, "Skirmishes," 38]). The Roman Empire would seem to be a collective socio-cultural achievement whose importance, in large part, is as this socio-cultural achievement itself. The imagery with which Nietzsche describes this culture, as a unified entity in its own right, would suggest that it is at least as important as the individuals it comprises and spawns.

The Roman Empire is not the sole example in his late work either. Nietzsche also criticizes Christianity for undoing the wonders of Islam:

> Christianity has cheated us out of the harvest of ancient culture; later it cheated us again, out of the harvest of the culture of *Islam*. The wonderful world of the Moorish culture of Spain, really more closely related to *us*, more congenial to our senses and tastes than Rome and Greece, was *trampled down* (I do not say by what kind of feet). Why? Because it owed its origin to noble, to *male* instincts, because it said Yes to life even with the rare

> and refined luxuries of Moorish life. Later the crusaders fought something before which they might more properly have prostrated themselves in the dust–a culture compared to which even our nineteenth century might well feel very poor, very "late" (A, 60).

Yet again, what Nietzsche decries is the loss of a whole culture and the ideals (e.g., nobility, virility) it embodies in its way of life. He does not pin his charge on the fact that great individuals will somehow not arise out of Islam. He instead appears to care about the culture, as an independent bearer of value.

Nietzsche similarly blames "the Germans" (and here he means especially Martin Luther) for "cheat[ing] Europe out of the last great cultural harvest which Europe could still have brought home–that of the *Renaissance*. Does one understand at last, does one *want* to understand what the Renaissance was? The *revaluation of Christian values*, the attempt, undertaken with every means, with every instinct, with all genius, to bring the *counter*-values, the *noble* values to victory" (A, 61). Does Nietzsche regard the Renaissance culture as simply an instrumental precondition for the rise of great human beings–and does he attribute value only to these great human beings? From what he says here, he also appears to care about the Renaissance, as a monumental cultural event, for what it collectively represents: the coming of "*noble* values to victory" (A, 61). Raphael and Michelangelo are of course great. They, and those like them, to an important extent, make the Renaissance great. But the Renaissance, in being the unprecedented creative florescence and triumph of noble values that it was, is also a thing of value in its own right. Perfectionistic values rest both in individuals and in whole cultures.

We see this emphasis on value instantiated in collectives, in addition to just in individuals, explicitly stated elsewhere in *The Antichrist*. Nietzsche first talks of great individuals: "[S]uccess in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a *higher type*, which is, in relation to mankind as a whole, a kind of overman [*Übermensch*]. Such fortunate accidents of great success have always been possible and *will* perhaps always be possible' (A, 4). But then, we should observe, he goes right on to add: "And even whole families, tribes, or peoples may occasionally represent such a bull's-eye" (A, 4). Great individuals, we see once again, are not the only goal.

Now it may well be that such a culture like that of the Roman Empire is no longer possible, given the advanced state of decadence in the modern West. Society is simply too fragmented for anything like that to be possible. Nietzsche seems to be of this opinion in *The Gay Science*:

> To say it briefly (for a long time people will still keep silent about it): What will not be built any more henceforth, and *cannot* be built any more, is – a society [*Gesellschaft*] in the old sense of that word; to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. *All of us are no longer material for a society*; this is a truth for which the time has come (GS, 356).

Nietzsche thinks that the sort of large-scale social transformation needed to engineer this "society in the old sense of that word" is no longer feasible. Liberal individualism has won the day: Everyone wants to pursue his private plan of life, and no one is content to be "*a stone in a*

great edifice" (GS, 356). Nietzsche does appear to give up hope for this sort of integrated society, united by a shared form of life.[26] To that extent, the readings that see him as moving away from culture (in *some* sense) in his later work are on to something important.

It is likely due to the fact that he recognizes this irreparable loss of social cohesion that when it comes to more recent cultures (Germany of the 19th century, for example), Nietzsche emphasizes the role of a few great individuals as the pillars of the culture. Heaping abuse on the Germans of his day for forgetting the importance of culture, he writes: "It is already known everywhere: in what matters most–and that always remains culture [*Cultur*]–the Germans are no longer worthy of consideration. One asks: Can you point to even a single spirit who counts from a European point of view, as your Goethe, your Hegel, your Heinrich Heine, your Schopenhauer counted?" (TI, "Germans," 4). Nietzsche is envisaging a sort of cosmopolitan European culture as opposed to the petty-minded jingoistic one of the German Reich. Such a culture, he implies, consists largely (maybe solely) in having a few excellent and broad-minded luminaries, whose breed Nietzsche sees as in danger of dying out. The greatness of these individuals, Nietzsche suggests, enables (whether instrumentally or constitutively) the greatness

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[26] By "society in the old sense of that word" (GS, 356) I think Nietzsche has in mind something akin to a collectivist culture. He is explicit about it being an "old sense" of the word, because *Gesellschaft* in 19th century German was often contrasted unfavorably with *Gemeinschaft*. The *locus classicus* for this distinction is Tönnies (1887), several years after *The Gay Science*, although Tönnies was codifying what was already in the air with the German romantics. *Gesellschaft* is a confederation of atomistic individuals, concerned with their own self-interest; *Gemeinschaft* is a more organic, communitarian entity. (As Young (2006) points out (p. 203), following Aschheim (1992) (p. 39-41), Tönnies drew inspiration from Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy* in particular.) It is instructive that Nietzsche does not himself contrast *Gesellschaft* with *Gemeinschaft* in this passage. *Gemeinschaft* is more communitarian in thinking that individuals get their authentic identities (in the social-philosophical sense) from the broader community. Yet there is a way in which *Gemeinschaft*, ironically enough, remains too individualistic. It is a community, but a community that cares, in a familial or neighborly way, about individuals as ends-in-themselves. Culture puts even greater emphasis on the collective as something of importance over and above the individuals who compose it. In such a collectivist culture, or "society in the old sense of that word," the individual is a mere "*stone in a great edifice*" (GS, 356).

of their surrounding culture.[27] But notice three things. First, consider the order of priority here: it is culture that "always" "matters most." Second, even if this is how cultures in the modern West flourish, it is not how cultures at all times flourish. And third, this emphasis in the modern world on an alternative route to flourishing via the excellence of a few isolated great individuals would seem to be *faute de mieux*: not the highest possible ideal for a culture, but the best we can hope for in our ineluctably disintegrated state.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to shed light on two distinctive conceptions of culture that surface in Nietzsche's early writings and persist into his later work. In addition to being a worldview, a culture, in the new sense in which Nietzsche uses it, becomes a much more substantial ontological entity in its own right: it is the life of a people conceived as an artistic accomplishment. No longer is the function of such a culture to make each individual *feel* existential solace, or to adopt an illusory perspective from which it seems as if the most terrible events in the world are aesthetically justified. Instead of just offering this illusory redemption of suffering, such a culture, on Nietzsche's view, can offer an *actual* redemption of (some) suffering insofar as the culture proves to be a great accomplishment, a theme I will be exploring further in Chapter 7.

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[27] Härtle (1939) writes: "Die große Persönlichkeit kann gar nicht logisch vom Volke getrennt werden, sie gehört zum Volke, als dessen höchste Verkörperung. Nicht das Genie ist Zweck des Volkes, sondern Zweck ist das Volk als letzte organische Lebensgemeinschaft. Zwar dient das Volk seinen Genies, doch ebenso dient das Genie dem Volk in polarer Wechselwirkung." [The great figure cannot at all be logically separated from the folk. He belongs to the folk, as its highest embodiment. The genius is not the goal of the people, but the goal is the folk as the final organic life community. Indeed, the folk serves its genius, and the genius serves the folk, in polar reciprocity] p. 158-9.

In keeping with these two conceptions, there are also two correlative models of cultural flourishing and decline. On the existential conception of culture, when such a culture declines, the society suffers, because its members are armed with inadequate resources for coping with the terrors of existence. The relation between culture (on this view) and the flourishing of a society is thus primarily instrumental: culture, as a downstream effect, promotes or fails to promote human flourishing. On the collectivist conception of culture by contrast, the culture is, at least in part, an end in itself. When such a culture declines, there is in the first instance a constitutive problem with the culture as such. It is manifesting either a lack of unity or weak and decadent ideals or both in its form of life. It is bad *qua* art work, not just on narrowly artistic grounds, but also on more broadly ethical grounds. As we will see in the chapters to follow, this collectivist conception of culture is the centerpiece of Nietzsche's ethics and social philosophy, informing his vision of human and cultural flourishing as well as his critical briefs against what he takes to hamper this flourishing.

In addition to the primary aim of illuminating Nietzsche's two distinctive understandings of culture, the secondary aim of this chapter has been to suggest the continuity between Nietzsche's early work and his later work, when it comes to the importance of collectivist culture. I have sought to undermine the interpretation of Nietzsche as turning toward a radical sort of individualism is his late work. Against this reading, I have shown that cultures also remain of concern.

It is undeniable, however, that Nietzsche puts a considerable premium on the excellence of great individuals. In the chapter to follow, I want to turn to consider his views on the subject of the great individual in more detail. The view that will emerge is one on which the greatness of

great individuals is, in key respects, intimately bound up with the cultures of which they are a part.

Chapter 2:
The Great Individual in Culture

I. Introduction

For many, Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer* is the emblem of Nietzsche's life and work–portraying, as it does, the solitary individual on the misty mountain peak, separated from the rest of culture. This image goes hand-in-hand with a view of the greatness of the great individual as a matter of his intrinsic features. Greatness, on this understanding of it, is thought to hinge on features of him that are independent of his particular cultural context, most especially on qualities of his character that are impervious to the vagaries of fortune and history. (It jars with the chauvinistically virile spirit of Nietzsche's works to use any pronoun but the masculine here, so that is what I shall do in what follows.)

It is beyond question that great individuals are a key focus of Nietzsche's concern. Now, as we saw in the last chapter, throughout Nietzsche's career, great individuals are never the exclusive focus of perfectionistic assessment; he cares about collectivist culture also as an end-in-itself. But even when it comes to these great individuals, their greatness, as I will be arguing in this chapter, is far more of an extrinsic matter than it might at first appear. I will be making this case in two steps. In the first part of the chapter, I try to undermine the idea that greatness is simply a matter of one's quality of soul (being healthy, self-reverential, and so on). Greatness also depends on successful accomplishment. In the second part of the chapter, I show that many of the salient characteristics of Nietzschean great individuals are extrinsic features that depend on the relation between the great individual and the broader cultural backdrop.

II. Greatness as a Quality of Soul

George, the feckless scion of the prominent family in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, thinks that "being things" is more important than "doing things."[1] Many of Nietzsche's scattered remarks on the subject of human greatness can give the impression that he is in sympathy with a view in this spirit.[2]

An extreme version of this "being things" view would take these personal features to be *dynamic* and *formal* characteristics alone: the great individual has the will to power in a high degree and has a certain unity among his drives and his projects.[3] A richer, and in my opinion, more plausible version of the view would build in more substantive considerations as well. It is not simply these general qualities of soul that make an individual great; it would, on the more substantive view, also matter whether the projects he engages in and the ends to which he puts his will to power are worthwhile ones in the first place. After all, the figures that Nietzsche points to as great individuals undertake exalted artistic, intellectual, and political endeavors. It should be no surprise that we find in Nietzsche's work no kudos for those whose consuming life project is to become able to belch the melody to *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*.

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[1] Tarkington (1918), Ch. 15.

[2] Nietzsche uses a number of different terms to get at the same basic concept of individual human excellence–the sort of excellence that he sees as threatened by Judeo-Christian morality. I will use the umbrella term "greatness" here.

[3] Hurka (2007). On Hurka's reading, Nietzsche's approach is "distinctively formal." Nietzsche, Hurka writes, "does not hold that there are substantive goals that perfection requires people to pursue, such as knowledge, virtue, or the creation of beauty. Instead, he evaluates goals in terms of formal qualities, ones that are compatible with many different substantive contents," p. 23. Hurka is right to suggest that formal considerations are very important to Nietzsche. (Cf., GS, 290). And he is also right to suggest that Nietzsche is a pluralist about potential projects (engaging in politics, writing poetry, composing symphonies). But nowhere does Nietzsche claim that there are *no* substantive constraints on what projects people can pursue. These "distinctively formal" conditions may be necessary conditions for greatness, but Nietzsche is not plausibly interpreted as holding that they are sufficient conditions.

Yet even these better, more substantive conceptions of greatness that I have just outlined would have it that whether a person is great depends *on him alone*–the structure of his soul, his attitudes, and his goals–not (allegedly) on what he actually does.[4]

Nietzsche (can seem, at least) to regard greatness as a matter of one's deportment or of one's character: "*The noble soul*," Nietzsche says, "*has reverence for itself*" (BGE, 287). Greatness, Nietzsche writes, involves "wanting to be by oneself, being able to be different, standing alone and having to live independently" (BGE, 212). "A human being who strives for something great considers everyone he meets on his way either as a means or as a delay and obstacle–or as a temporary resting place" (BGE, 273). He "has a taste only for what is good for him" (EH, "Wise," 2). Nietzsche's "ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being" is of one "who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity" (BGE, 56). Nietzsche surely attributes characteristics of this sort to the great individuals he celebrates. Drawing on these passages, one might conclude that greatness for Nietzsche is a matter of one's psychic and physical constitution and one's attitudes towards oneself, others, and the world.[5]

Yet should the various character traits and distinctive attitudes that Nietzsche cites, treated as a package, be taken as *sufficient* conditions for greatness?[6] The texts leave open the answer to this important exegetical question. Nowhere does Nietzsche ever claim that these

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[4] This sharp separation between "what one is" and "what one does" depends on construing the will-to-power (if taken to be a feature of "what one is") as the mere disposition or capability to express power. It is questionable whether Nietzsche thinks one even can have this capability in the absence of actual manifestations of it (GM, I:13).

[5] Leiter (2002) draws on the passages I have cited above, and several others, in support of the claim that the great individual has the following five qualities: he (i) is drawn to solitude and deals with others instrumentally, (ii) is in pursuit of a unified project, with the attendant burdens and responsibilities, (iii) is essentially healthy and resilient, (iv) is life affirming, and (v) is self-reverential. See p. 116-120.

[6] Leiter (2002) claims that these are "plainly sufficient" conditions for Nietzschean greatness. See p. 116.

features, individually or jointly, are *sufficient* for greatness, even if they are characteristic of it, and perhaps necessary for it. And rightly so, I think. For such a view would have troubling implications. In discounting the importance of what one does and focusing instead simply on what one is–itself a questionable separation–it risks admitting underachievers, however sedulous, into the pantheon of great individuals. Given the texts' silence on the sufficiency issue, philosophical charity, I want to argue, suggests that we interpret Nietzsche, in citing the personal traits he does, as offering generic characteristics of greatness, perhaps even necessary conditions for it, but by no means presenting sufficient conditions for greatness.

I take it that those who attribute the sufficiency claim to Nietzsche are also trying to be charitable, albeit on different grounds. After all, given the incautious way Nietzsche tends to express himself, in principle, most of Nietzsche's remarks about greatness, *taken individually*, could be read as sufficient conditions for greatness. Take "*The noble soul has reverence for itself*" (BGE, 287). Almost surely having reverence for oneself is not individually sufficient to make one great, lest every run-of-the-mill narcissist count as great. Hence, perhaps, the *joint* sufficiency view, bundling various attitudes and character traits together. Although still, why *sufficiency*? Perhaps the guiding philosophical motivation behind this interpretation is to provide an account that captures why Nietzsche's paradigm examples of great individuals (e.g., Goethe, Beethoven, Napoleon and Nietzsche himself) *are* great. But even still, this reading would seem to have left out the most obvious unifying feature among these individuals. *To be great is to accomplish great things*. Isn't this what sets Beethoven, Goethe, Napoleon, and Nietzsche apart from would-be greats who are similarly ambitious, life-affirming, healthy, self-reverential, manipulative, and so on, and yet never actually write anything to equal the late

quartets or the *Elective Affinities* or never actually make their mark on the history of Western European culture?

This is *so* obvious, it seems to me, that Nietzsche never sees fit to mention it explicitly. It is just the *background assumption* that great people must accomplish great things. The reason that Nietzsche places extraordinary emphasis on personal characteristics instead of on achievement, I suggest, is that he is wary of judging whether a person is great *just* by his deeds, considered in insolation: Putatively similar deeds can spring from a decadent, self-doubting, vengeful, and poisoned soul, as much as from a great one.[7] A deed moreover can have momentous, wide-ranging effects–indeed *it* can be of great worth, aesthetic or otherwise–but that does not automatically make *its doer* great, rather than merely lucky.[8] On the interpretation I will offer here, we should not read Nietzsche as denying that actions, works, and effects *do* matter to whether someone counts as great; what he is denying is that, taken on their own, these actions, works, and effects provide *definitive evidence* of a person's greatness.

Defenders of the sufficiency view draw particular sustenance from a famous passage in *Beyond Good and Evil* and from one in the *Nachlaß* where Nietzsche seems to be discounting the importance of actions, works, and effects entirely to whether someone is to count as great.[9] If the overall reading I am suggesting is to work–namely that it is just Nietzsche's unmentioned default assumption that these obviously *do* matter–my reading will need to account for these salient passages that would seem to militate against it. My aim here is to propose an alternative

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[7] e.g., Luther's Bible. Nietzsche thinks that judged on its aesthetic merits, it is one of the greatest stylistic works in the German language (BGE, 247), but Nietzsche excoriates Luther time and again as a person; he has, as Nietzsche says, the "vengeful instincts of a shipwrecked priest..." (A, 61).

[8] The "merely" is important, because Nietzsche does seem to think that some degree of luck is important. See BGE, 274.

[9] See Leiter (2002), p. 120.

reading of these passages that lends credence to the view that accomplishment matters to whether a person is great.

Let us begin with the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*. In describing the features of the noble soul, Nietzsche writes:

> –What is noble [*vornehm*]? What does the word "noble" still mean to us today? What betrays, what allows one to recognize the noble human being, under this heavy, overcast sky of the beginning rule of the plebs that makes everything opaque and leaden?
>
> It is not actions that prove him–actions are always open to many interpretations [*vieldeutig*], always inscrutable [*unergründlich*]–nor is it "works." Among artists and scholars today one finds enough of those who betray by their works how they are impelled by a profound desire for what is noble; but just this need *for* what is noble is fundamentally different from the needs of the noble soul itself and actually the eloquent and dangerous mark of its lack. It is not the works, it is the *faith* that is decisive here, that determines the order of rank–to take up again an ancient religious formula in a new and more profound sense: some fundamental certainty that a noble soul has about itself, something that cannot be sought, nor found, nor perhaps lost.
>
> *The noble soul has reverence* [*Ehrfurcht*] *for itself* (BGE, 287).

Nietzsche begins by asking what nobility is or what it means to us today. But he then recasts the issue in a more epistemic way, framing a question that guides the rest of the passage: "what betrays, what allows one to recognize the noble human being?" Nietzsche's seeming

skepticism about the relevance of actions or works to nobility is in answer to this epistemic version of the question. The main issue is what evidence we get from actions or works about whether the person who performs them is noble. Nietzsche here is doubting whether actions or works can *themselves* establish that someone is noble. By no means is it obvious that Nietzsche is denying the intuitive point that actions or works matter to making someone great. His point is instead the sensible one that *just* looking to the deed itself, in isolation from considerations about the agent who produced it, the deed will be "inscrutable," "open to many possible interpretations." If, to use an example inspired by Plato's *Laches*, I see a person standing his ground as the enemy rushes toward him, can I tell that it is an act of bravery? Perhaps he is heroic and ready to face the enemy. But then again, perhaps he is a coward, frozen in fear. Or maybe he is exhausted with life, and ready to die, but too weak to do himself in. Just looking to the action, or more precisely, perhaps, the *action segment*–the behavior of standing still as the enemy approaches–does not settle the question. One needs to situate the deed in a rich context of the agent's other past deeds, dispositions, his presumptive mental states, and so on, in order to understand and evaluate the action.

Sometimes Nietzsche gestures at a stronger view about not just the assessment, but the very individuation of actions. It might seem that your action of walking down the steps and my action of walking down the steps are the very same action, just performed by different people. Yet Nietzsche's view is that "...there neither are nor can be actions that are the same; ...every action that has ever been done was done in an altogether unique and irretrievable way, and this will be equally true of every future action" (GS, 335). This is not, I think, supposed to be the trivial thesis that token actions are numerically distinct. It is the more radical thesis that there

are no two qualitatively identical actions, because the very identity of an action is constituted by the larger holistic web in which it is imbedded, one of the agent's character, past actions, and current situation. If we look just to the "coarse exterior" of a putative action, carved off from this rich context, we may be deceived into thinking it is qualitatively the same as another action, but in fact it is not. In any event, whether we take as Nietzsche's considered position this more extreme view or something milder about needing context to evaluate or to determine the nature of an action, Nietzsche's point is that simply by noticing that an agent does something that is apparently indicative of greatness, we cannot determine *on that basis alone* whether he himself is great. We need to bring to bear considerations about the agent to determine the value and perhaps even the precise nature of the action he has performed.[10]

Nietzsche's rather elliptically-presented example in BGE, 287 is that of a person's evincing his fascination with nobility in his artistic or scholarly works. What are we to make of the fact that a person does so? Nietzsche has of course been exemplifying precisely this fascination himself in Part IX of *Beyond Good and Evil* that Section 287 comes from. His point, I take it, is that this activity of lauding nobility, judged in isolation, is "inscrutable," "open to many interpretations" (BGE, 287). For it can have a different significance, perhaps even become a different action, depending on the character and motivations of the agents who manifest it. In the case of some people, he claims, this fascination with nobility is rooted in their own inadequacies. Some artists and scholars "betray by their works" that they are "impelled by a profound desire for what is noble" (BGE, 287). This craving for nobility becomes an "eloquent and dangerous" sign of the person's *lack* of nobility, and presumably this concern with nobility

[10] "The value of an action," as Nietzsche puts it in a notebook entry, "depends on who performs it and whether it stems from his depths or from his surface: that means, how deeply it is individual" (KSA, 11:283 [1884]).

thus amounts to a kind of compensatory substitute. Perhaps Nietzsche has Wagner in mind here as his case in point: Wagner's fascination with Teutonic heroism *à la* Siegfried, coming from someone else–someone healthier and less decadent–might be a sign of strength; in Wagner's case it is a sign of sickness and of an impoverished soul. Nietzsche does not mention the flip-side, but I suppose we are to think that in Nietzsche's own case, his concern with nobility amounts to something other than a compensation for personal inadequacies, being instead the authentic and appropriate expression of a noble soul that has "*reverence for itself*" (BGE, 287). Just looking to the artwork or to the manuscript, however, in isolation from considerations about the agent who produced it, in particular this consideration about whether he has self-reverential faith, we cannot tell whether the concern with nobility manifested in his work is that of a noble or an ignoble soul.

Thus, when Nietzsche concludes in BGE, 287 that the "faith" is what is "decisive," he is not meaning to deny that actions matter at all to the question of greatness. Nietzsche may well think that deeds matter very much to whether someone is great, but that they are not appropriately taken as evidence of nobility (and thus partly of greatness) until we put them in a rich context. And faith on the part of the doer is vital in making this construal possible.

The second key passage that I want to consider comes from the *Nachlaß*:

> The best example of the degree to which a plebeian agitator of the mob is incapable of comprehending the concept "higher nature" is provided by Buckle. The view he combats so passionately–that "great men," individuals, princes, statesmen, geniuses, generals are the levers and causes of all great movements–is instinctively misunderstood by him, as if

> it meant that what is essential and valuable in such "higher men" were their capacity for setting masses in motion: in short, their effect. But the "higher nature" of the great man lies in being different, in incommunicability, in distance of rank, not in an effect of any kind [*nicht in irgend welchen Wirkungen*]–even if he made the whole globe tremble (WP, 876; KSA, 13:497-498)

Nietzsche is here arguing against what is apparently the view of Henry Buckle, author of the *History of Civilization in England*. As with the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, it might seem here that "effects" are irrelevant to the question of whether someone is great. But on closer examination of the passage, we see that this dramatic reading is not called for. Nietzsche is interested here in the question of how moving the masses (or having any other effect) reflects on the "higher nature" of the great man. To begin with, Nietzsche wants to point out that just because one can move the masses it doesn't thereby follow that one is great. Nietzsche is also making the stronger claim that the "higher nature" of the great man does not lie in having effects of any kind. Yet does this mean that greatness is independent of having effects on the world? Not obviously. It may well be that having a sort of character (a "higher nature," which Nietzsche often labels "nobility") *and* having effects (including accomplishing great things) are *both* important.

As with the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, what Nietzsche is warning against is an inference from effects to a conclusion that the perpetrator of those effects has a higher nature. It does not, after all, require a higher nature to have momentous effects, to "ma[ke] the whole globe tremble." One could just be in the right place at the right time and pull the trigger that

starts a revolution. Or one could be animated in doing what one does by what, according to Nietzsche's lights, are debased motives. Few, according to Nietzsche, have had such far reaching effects on human history as St. Paul, the inventor of Christianity. But we would not want these effects to redound to his greatness as a Nietzschean great individual. For far from having a "higher nature," he has poisoned, hate-filled soul (A, 42). In other cases, one can have important effects *and* have a noble soul. Take the case of Napoleon. He indisputably has important effects on human history. But he is also, in Nietzsche's words, "the *noble ideal as such* made flesh" (GM, 1:16). The reason Nietzsche in his work emphasizes qualities of soul, in the rather Stoic fashion he does, and discounts effects is not because effects on his view do not matter at all. But it is rather because they are not *themselves* sufficient for (or, in isolation, indicative of) greatness.

I have tried to make the case that accomplishment matters to whether someone is great. Or at least I have tried to show that Nietzsche, appearances sometimes to the contrary, should not be read as denying this highly intuitive point. If we take as our interpretive aim to reconstruct from Nietzsche's texts the qualities possessed by the individuals he classifies as great, it seems to me that we should not leave accomplishing great things off of the list, even if Nietzsche thinks this is too obvious to place much stress on it himself.

III. Greatness and (Even More) Extrinsic Features

We have so far seen that being great depends not just on what one is, but on what one does. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to describe Nietzsche as trying to eliminate any sharp boundary between the two, by stressing, quite plausibly, that these two things are not wholly separate. *What one is* is partly a function of *what one does*. In this section, I want to carry

forward a similar line of thinking which construes what one is as not a purely extrinsic matter, but partly constituted by one's relations to a broader cultural backdrop.

To begin with, one of Nietzsche's commitments is that the great individual is one who is "able to be different" (BGE, 212).[11] Yet of course being different depends on what the rest of the world is like; you cannot be different if many other people – or, Dionysus forbid, everyone else – is just like you. For imagine that there is not one Beethoven, but five hundred Beethovens – composers of similar quality of soul, writing the very same music.[12] If Nietzsche cares about singularity as criterial of greatness, this should render each one of these Beethovens less valuable as radiant examples of human greatness. One important factor in human excellence, in this way, is dependent on what the rest of the culture is like.

It is for this reason, among others, that the lingo of 'maximizing' perfection, the sort we find in the readings of Nietzsche offered by Rawls and Hurka, can be misleading in understanding Nietzsche's particular variety of perfectionism.[13] Maximization has its most common application where the thing to be maximized is something atomistically and

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[11] Cf., WP, 876. A more subtle question is whether the great individual is great (partly, at least) in virtue of being different. Given the unusual emphasis Nietzsche puts on the quality of being different, both in the published work and in the *Nachlaß*, we might draw this hypothesis, though the texts do not settle the matter definitively. Being different might in principle be a necessary concomitant, as opposed to a constituent, of Nietzschean greatness. My thanks to Josh Gillon for suggesting this possibility.

[12] Fanciful thought experiments might seem inappropriate when it comes to Nietzsche, but we should not forget that he gave us one of the most fanciful thought experiments ever devised–the thought that the events that have happened will repeat themselves again to eternity. See GS, 341.

[13] Cf. Rawls, who writes of the principle of perfection he attributes to Nietzsche, "it is the sole principle of a teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture," §50. Hurka, similarly, attributes to Nietzsche the principle of "maximax," according to which the overall good is best served by maximizing the well-being of the most well-off (in the sense of being the most creative and talented). Hurka's idea appears to be that human excellence, understood as a formal and dynamic feature of individual human beings, is something of atomistic and intrinsic value, such that more of it (so long as it is still of the highest intrinsic quality) is better. For the reasons I outline above, I do not think we should attribute such a view to Nietzsche. Now it bears pointing out that one could in principle want to maximize excellence in a more *holistic* spirit; one could want there to be the most excellence possible from the standpoint of the whole. Does Nietzsche want to "maximize" excellence *even* in this sense? He surely cares that there *is* excellence, but whether he wants to *maximize* it is another matter. Defenders of this view do not cite any textual support, nor can I find any.

intrinsically valuable, so that having more of the thing is thereby that much better. Having pleasurable experiences, or having knowledge, or having one's desires satisfied are often thought (though not of course by Nietzsche) to be worthwhile candidates for the sorts of things to be maximized. Yet is the value of exemplary human excellence like this? We should be wary of committing Nietzsche to a view that would have it that a world of five hundred Beethovens is thereby five hundred times better than the world of one. It is doubtful that Nietzsche would accept such a view, given his concern for singularity, and probably for many other reasons as well.

Suppose we vary the example, and imagine instead those "Beethovens" are doing interestingly different things.[14] The intuition here becomes rather less strong, I take it, that those Beethovens are individually (and aggregatively) less valuable. But would Nietzsche think a world in which–*per impossible*–everyone were as strong, creative, and talented as Beethoven would be the best world of all, as far as human greatness is concerned? There is reason for doubting this. Greatness as a concept (at least in the elitist way Nietzsche uses it) would seem to be inherently contrastive: to be great is to be far above the middling. In order then for one person or a few people to be great, most people must *not* be great. "Slavery in some sense or other" or an "ordering of rank" is no doubt instrumentally important to Nietzsche in creating the material and spiritual conditions for human greatness to flourish (BGE, 257-8). But this hierarchy and rank-ordering is also important in this purely conceptual way too: It is courting incoherence to

[14] My thanks to Stephen Mulhall for suggesting this variant of the case.

imagine a world in which *everyone* is great, the ego-stroking ideologies of kindergarden and, Nietzsche might add, democratic egalitarianism aside.[15]

This question about whether greatness is in principle open to everyone should not be confused with the question about whether a higher form of life is open to everyone–higher, that is, relative to one's starting point. Nor should it be confused with the question about whether Nietzsche cares (in some sense) about the quality of lives that everyone leads. It may be that everyone, on the route to self-development and self-overcoming, can go a few steps higher than he currently is and that Nietzsche would applaud this advancement. These issues I will take up again in Chapter 7. But the important point is that there is not the space for everyone to cluster on the top step, so as to receive the laurels of greatness.

Consider now a similar sort of case, again involving Beethoven. He transformed the Classical symphony and paved the way for Romanticism. Now imagine a Beethoven *Doppelgänger* in the New York contemporary music scene. (Pierre Menard, composer of the Eroica?)[16] Should we think *he* is just as great? In an important sense: *no.* Nietzsche praises great individuals for their creativity–in particular for the creation of something that is new and path-breaking–(BGE, 211; Cf., WP, 957), whether philosophies, laws, artworks, or gods. But *whether* something is new and pathbreaking depends on when it comes and what else is being done and has been done. Creativity is thus in the same boat with singularity: whether someone counts as

[15] There might be thought to be the further possibility that the mass of "mediocrities" (to use one of Nietzsche's words–BGE, 262; A, 57) might be swept away, so only a few exceptionally talented individuals remained. Would *they* no longer count as great? It is difficult to know what Nietzsche would want to say about such a case, or even if he would regard it as possible. He, after all, takes the "*pathos of distance*" to afford great individuals indispensable sustenance (BGE, 257): They are aided in their greatness by being able to regard themselves as better than the mass of mankind, whom they look upon as "slaves" and "instruments" (BGE, 258). Whether simply *the thought* of such people would be enough is far from clear. At some point, these fanciful thought experiments, however helpful in teasing out Nietzsche's ideas, become too fanciful to remain anchored in the text and we verge into idle speculation.

[16] In the Jorge Luis Borges short story, "Pierre Menard: Author of the *Quixote*," the 20th century writer Pierre Menard writes a line-for-line replica of *Don Quixote*. See Borges (1962).

creative depends–in large part anyway–on what the cultural landscape is like, has been like, and perhaps as well, will be like.

This case, I hope, will serve to elicit a more general intuition: We cannot, it would seem, simply pluck the great individual from one cultural context and deposit him in another, expecting him to be just as great in that latter context. Beethoven was fresh and bold in taking up the artistic project he did. Yet his modern double, even if he is not consciously aping Beethoven–even if, *per impossible*, he somehow wrote the *Eroica* from his own original experiences– would be reactionary and buffoonish.

In addition to these criteria of creativity and singularity, Nietzsche suggests that the great individuals he longs for exude the quality of *Pracht*– "magnificence" or "splendor" (GM, "Preface," 6), a feature with strongly aesthetic connotations. Yet we should think about how such values with an aesthetic aspect generally function. They are the paradigm of holistic values, resistant to any sort of crude aggregation. The painting of the regal figure, swathed in ermine, gold, and silks, depicts something magnificent. But adding ten more of such figures does not *thereby* make the painting's subject matter *ten times* more magnificent. In contexts where such aesthetically charged values are at issue, the value that a part has typically depends on the relevant whole in which it is situated.[17] In the context of another whole, that same part would not necessarily have the same value. Since the part is not an atomistic bearer of intrinsic value, value does not increase in lockstep as similar parts are added. (Yet another reason the world of five hundred Beethovens, whether identical or interestingly different, would not *automatically* be five hundred times better...) Nietzsche is fond of drawing lessons from the arts and applying

[17] The relevant 'whole' of course is not fixed and varies with context. Furthermore, there are inter-nested wholes. For example, a painting by Cézanne has its own internal unity. But it might fit into another relevant aesthetic whole on a particular wall (say at the Barnes Foundation) or in the whole artistic output of Cézanne himself.

them to life (e.g., GS*,* 290; 299; 301), and it would not be surprising if this orientation informs his thinking about these matters too.

Furthermore, on Nietzsche's view, greatness is couched as an inherently *recognitive* matter, in that being great requires the sanction, if not of the entire society, then of at least a few other cultural luminaries, whether in one's own time or after one's death. The person who is overlooked completely, would not, on such a view, *get to be great,* regardless of what he actually does. Consider what Nietzsche says at the beginning of the fourth essay of the *Untimely Meditations*:

> For an event to possess greatness two things must come together: greatness of spirit in those who accomplish it and greatness of spirit in those who experience it. No event possesses greatness in itself, though it involve the disappearance of whole constellations, the destruction of entire peoples, the foundation of vast states or the prosecution of wars involving tremendous forces and tremendous losses (UM, IV:1)

Nietzsche then concludes that the individual deed of a man great in himself [*selbst*] lacks greatness if it is brief and without resonance or effect" (UM, IV:1). I take it that Nietzsche means these "two things [that] must come together" as *necessary* and not as sufficient conditions. For the person of great soul witnessing a person of great soul tying his shoelaces is not *thereby* witnessing a great event. It almost certainly matters what activity the great person is engaged in and whether that activity is meritorious enough to count toward greatness. On the reading I am proposing, recognition (by people of sufficiently great soul) is necessary in order

for an event (and the person who performs it) to count as great. This can seem like a silly and poorly motivated kind of verificationism about greatness–as if greatness, some seemingly independent property people have, only *comes into being* when it gets discovered by others. But I think Nietzsche's point, more sensibly construed, is that greatness (unlike, say, the property of having two eyes) is a feature that is extrinsic in being *partly constituted* by the recognition of one's traits and achievements by suitable people. One may of course have the virtuous traits that contribute to greatness. One may have accomplished significant things that are typically a mark of greatness. But being great *also* requires being recognized by others as having these features or having done these things that redound to greatness.

Now, I have grounded this recognitive conception of greatness in textual evidence from Nietzsche's fairly early work (from 1876), where this view gets its most explicit statement. Does he change his mind? Potential evidence in later texts that he rethinks this earlier view comes in *Beyond Good and Evil* (from 1886).[18] Here he writes:

> The greatest events and thoughts–but the greatest thoughts are the greatest events–are comprehended [*begriffen*] last: the generations that are contemporaneous with them do not *experience* such events–they live right past them. What happens is like what happens in the realm of the stars [*Es geschieht da Etwas, wie im Reich der Sterne*]. The light of the remotest stars comes last to men; and until it has arrived man *denies* that there are–stars there. "How many centuries does a spirit require to be comprehended?"–that is a standard, too; with that, too, one creates an order of rank and etiquette that is still needed–for spirit and star (BGE, 285).

[18] As suggested in Shaw (2007), p. 121.

This much seems indisputable: the event (or the thought) will have occurred whether it is recognized. The star will be there and the light will emanate from it. The key point is whether it is also *great*, independently of being recognized as great. The "greatest events and thoughts" are comprehended last, Nietzsche says. That is to say that they *are* finally comprehended. But is their greatness completely independent of the eventual recognition that follows from this comprehension, so that they were great *before* being so recognized? As I read Nietzsche's image it is neutral on these matters: Is the greatness an *intrinsic property* of the star, reflected in the light that travels with it down to earth? Or is the greatness partly but importantly constituted by the eventual recognition of the star–the thought or event–as having the admirable features it does, once the light reaches those who are ready for it? Take the case of some works of philosophy, left in a vault and forgotten by history. If no one knows about them, the society will, to continue with the image, deny the existence of this "star," until the "light" reaches them when the works are discovered. But this is all compatible with thinking that the works are great only when recognized as so.[19] Recognition, famously, is a notion applicable whether the property recognized is one that is had independently of the recognition (as when I recognize I have hands) or one partly conferred by the recognition itself (as when the Chair recognizes my right to speak at the meeting). What is at issue is just which sense of recognition is involved when it comes to greatness and whether it is in part the latter sense. Nietzsche's remarks in BGE, 285 are compatible with his earlier view.

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[19] It is important to stress that this is largely independent of meta-axiological issues. Greatness, on this view, would of course not be a wholly mind-independent and response-independent feature of things. But from this minor concession to a subjective dimension of greatness, it does not follow that there are no genuine standards of correctness, no genuine better or worse, in the things that are judged as great.

There are various additional ways that the wider culture might be taken constitutively to matter to greatness. It might be that the standards of greatness are themselves culturally-constituted in a way far more radical and ambitious than the sort of historical and cultural variability I am envisaging in the Pierre Menard-style example. It might be that we can only understand behaviors as actions when we situate them in a rich context, drawing on the conceptual framework of the culture in which those actions are performed, so as to see the goals of the actions by those shared lights.[20] Nietzsche may well accept these further claims just mentioned. Investigation of these additional points I will need to leave for another occasion. I have of course also bracketed the manifold ways in which the cultural surroundings, in an *instrumental* way, might promote or stymie the flourishing of a great person, perhaps in affording him beneficial artistic stimulation or, on the other hand, in saddling him with a detrimentally life-negating ideology. There is much more to be said on that score too. I instead have focused in this section on the ways in which the features that make a person great are not just intrinsic properties of the person, but are partly constituted by relations in which he stands to a cultural backdrop.

IV. Conclusion

I have so far sketched a view where even the greatness of Nietzschean great individuals is as much external as internal, as much extrinsic as intrinsic. It matters not just what they are, but what they do. And it matters not just what properties in isolation they have, but also what relational properties they have, thanks to what the world around them is like. While it is correct

[20] Such a view is sketched in Pippin (2010), p. 77-8.

that Nietzsche puts a great deal of emphasis on the greatness of great individuals, his understanding of how and why they are great is deeply social.

In closing I would like to touch on a matter that we broached at the outset: might personal characteristics and attitudes, along with momentous accomplishments, all judged in light of a cultural backdrop, jointly be sufficient for greatness? I am hesitant to say this. For the whole vocabulary of "sufficiency" can be misleading, I think. There is something importantly right in Alexander Nehamas's suggestion that Nietzsche exemplifies rather than describes greatness in the character his texts present.[21] Nehamas should not be read here as denying that Nietzsche gives descriptions in the sense of giving characterizations *in general terms* of what greatness amounts to. But what Nietzsche does not do is specify in advance *precise conditions* for how to be great, in such a way that one could, if one had sufficient ability, simply follow instructions and thereby be great, or in such a way that observers could look to these conditions and easily settle the question of whether someone is great.

Analogies to art are irresistible here:[22] One might be able to specify in very general terms the features of the greatest works of art, perhaps what are in some sense "sufficient conditions" for being great works of art. Let us, just by way of a simple example, say that the works need to be in some respect interestingly original and that they need to say something deep and important about the human condition. But meeting these standards of greatness are not like winning a 5K race, where the success conditions are clearly specifiable in advance, and, except when runners are nose-to-nose at the finish line, it is fairly clear, by the conditions specified, who has won. The success conditions for artistic greatness just cannot be specified in enough

[21] Nehamas (1985), p. 232-33.

[22] Nehamas (1985) leans on the analogy to the arts himself, at p. 233 and in his reading generally.

detail so that it becomes an easy question, brooking no debate, *whether* a work meets them.[23] So too, I suspect, with the conditions for the Nietzschean greatness of individuals. Just what is it to be truly self-reverential? Suppose you have a grandiose self-conception, but repressed feelings that you are a failure that your self-conception masks. Does this count? Suppose you become self-reverential because you want to spite Christians who laud self-abasement. Suppose you think highly of yourself, but have flickers of self-doubt. Some cases are easier than others, of course. But it is going to be very difficult, almost certainly impossible, to specify conditions for self-reverence (and for the other characteristics of greatness) in such a way as to foreclose sensible discussion about whether a given person meets them. The important truth in saying that Nietzsche does not describe his ideal of greatness (or give *helpfully regulative* "sufficient" conditions for it) is that he does not describe it in such a way that the conditions specified are like the conditions that can be specified for winning a game of chess. Whether someone is great is always going to involve a great deal of interpretation both of what he is–and, I have suggested, of what he does.

In the chapter to come, we will continue the theme of the interrelationship between individuals and cultures by looking to Nietzsche's conception of individual and cultural decadence. The individual is the microcosm of the cultural macrocosm. By looking to what decadence amounts to in the individual case, we will get a clearer picture of what it amounts to at the cultural level.

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[23] I draw here on a similar distinction Ridley (2009) makes regarding two types of promises.

Chapter 3:
"The Whole No Longer Lives At All":
On the Decadence of Individuals and Cultures

I. Introduction

"Nothing has preoccupied me more profoundly than the problem of decadence," Nietzsche writes in his preface to *The Case of Wagner*, "'Good and evil' is merely a variation of that problem." Given that Nietzsche announces in 1888, the final year of his active life, that the problem of decadence is the one that has concerned him more deeply than any other, it is a bit surprising that the issue has received relatively scant attention in the anglophone secondary literature on Nietzsche.[1] Then again, maybe this neglect is not so surprising: Perhaps "decadence" is thought by many interpreters to be nothing more than a vague term of abuse, something too overripe and parochially *fin de siècle* to find a central place in any rigorous reconstruction of Nietzsche's views.[2] (Decadence is not, to say the least, the centerpiece of a burgeoning contemporary philosophical research program.) Or perhaps Nietzsche's concern with decadence is written off as the peculiar obsession of a mind descending into madness and

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[1] The few exceptions to the general trend are Conway (1997) and Benson (2008). There is only a brief discussion of decadence in: Leiter (2002), p. 158, Richardson (1996), p. 59, and Hunt (1991), p. 126-30. Leiter, as I discuss below, rightly fastens on a key symptom of decadence (wanting what is worst for one), but does not get to (what I believe to be) its underlying explanation. Richardson and Hunt, by contrast, rightly note that Nietzsche conceives of decadence as at core a failure of integration. But both interpretations, drawing heavily on the *Nachlaß*, take Nietzsche to have an axiology that would ground all value in increases of power. Their readings would thus have it that the only reason decadence is a problem is that it ultimately leads to a diminution of power. My own account emphasizes the extent to which this structural failing is bad in itself.

[2] Nietzsche, it is often thought, takes the term "décadence," which appears in the works of 1888 with the *accent aigu*, from the French theorist Paul Bourget, in particular from the latter's "Theorie de la décadence," a study on the work of Charles Baudelaire. Gregory Moore has cast doubt on Bourget as the original source of the term, pointing out a use of the term (though without the accent) in 1877, before Nietzsche first read Bourget. See Moore (2002), p. 121.

thus not worthy of serious attention. Few scholars–if they discuss decadence at all–take Nietzsche at his word and ascribe to it the central importance that he does. Like some of Nietzsche's more embarrassing forays into physiological speculation, or his frequent and vituperative expressions of misogyny, his constant talk of decadence may seem something to be soft-pedaled.[3]

But this failure to give decadence its due is a mistake. For far from being a peripheral issue, the concept of decadence is, as Nietzsche himself suggests, central in his work, all the way from his earliest book *The Birth of Tragedy* describing the downfall of Greek tragic culture at the hands of Socratism to his charges against Christianity in *The Antichrist*. Understanding decadence is crucial to understanding Nietzsche's more recognizably philosophical concerns in ethics and social philosophy. For he takes it to be one of, if not *the*, looming threat that individuals and cultures face.

My aim in this chapter is to reconstruct what Nietzsche means by "decadence." In the technical sense in which he uses this term, it is not simply an exotic synonym for "bad," nor is it just Nietzsche's idiosyncratic way of expressing his distaste for forms of life that he finds repellent. The term instead describes a kind of structural failing in human individuals and cultures–a failing that Nietzsche takes to be a main obstacle to their flourishing.

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[3] By my count, he mentions decadence and its cognates over 90 times in the 4 main works of 1888. Some of his most celebrated and (it is often thought) most central ideas–the eternal recurrence, perspectivism, the *Übermensch*, and the death of God–are mentioned far less frequently (if at all) in the final works–and indeed in the corpus of work more generally. Yet it is these concepts that interpreters tend to fasten on as the key to Nietzsche's thought.

II. Nietzsche's Technical Concept of Decadence

Let's begin by discussing the term "decadence" itself. For many it will conjure up ideas of a dissolute way of living–one of extreme luxuriousness and licentiousness in food, dress, and sexual practice–of fattened sybarites, swaddled in silk and gorging themselves to the point of gout, with many willing concubines at their feet. Or it will evoke images of hypersensitive, neurasthenic aesthetes, deprived of daylight and taking all their sustenance from aesthetic experience. Of late, the term has sometimes come to have milder, more positive connotations–mothers pampering themselves with "decadent" bubble baths and chocolate truffles when they need a respite from their shrieking children–indulgent, yes, but, according to Madison Avenue, basically a harmless treat. Yet we must put these caricatures aside if we are to understand the technical sense that Nietzsche gives to the term "decadence." He regards decadence not as a weekend extravagance, but as a serious and destructive flaw on the personal and the social level.[4] And this weakness, by Nietzsche's lights, needn't consist in a taste for the pleasures of the flesh; almost always, in fact, it involves a fanatical ascetic repudiation of these sorts of sensuous delights. (It is almost as if Nietzsche is giving a new meaning to the word.) This ascetic repudiation, along with other decadent attitudes and behaviors are really *symptoms* of a more fundamental problem. As I shall try to make clear in what follows, for Nietzsche decadence is literally a kind of disorder – that is, a lack of cohesive order – within the individual or the culture. It is this disorder that is to blame for the symptoms of decadence that Nietzsche identifies.

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[4] Of course, there is also a competing tradition in the second half of the 19th century of *glorifying* decadence of some form (e.g., Huysmans, Baudelaire) to which Nietzsche most definitely does not belong. It is likely however that such thinkers do not understand decadence in precisely the way that Nietzsche does.

In his more rashly scientistic moods, Nietzsche describes the decadence of individuals as a kind of organically-conditioned physiological degeneration of the human species. (Thus a "disorder" in the more familiar sense as well.) Because of this degeneration of the human type (TI, "Errors," 2 and "Skirmishes," 37), or as the result of various debilities of the "nerves" (A, 51 and CW, 5), humans come to manifest a range of symptoms of decadence, Nietzsche supposes.[5] They thus come do things of a self-destructive stripe: they lacerate themselves; they contemn this sublunary world; they disdain their "lower" sexual and animal nature; they devote their lives to the contemplation or worship of non-entities (the eternal Forms, God), they identify their "true" self with a non-entity (a non-material eternal soul), and so on. These sickly individual decadents, Nietzsche thinks, inexorably go on to spawn decadent religions, philosophies, and works of art, symptomatic and expressive of their decadence. These spiritual, intellectual, and artistic expressions of decadence in turn prove irresistibly attractive to other decadents. Like diabetics attracted to a bake sale or hypertensives drawn to salty snacks, decadents, as the result of their condition, come to crave what is worst for them.[6] It is *because* someone is decadent that Wagner's operas or Christianity appeals to him. And going to *Parsifal*, or to church, only serves to make the basic problem worse.[7]

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[5] It can often be difficult to tell how literally Nietzsche means his physiological speculations to be taken. Cp. GM, III:15. Here he suggests that the origins of bad conscience, "may perhaps lie in some disease of the *nervus sympathicus*, or in an excessive secretion of bile, or in a deficiency of potassium sulfate and phosphate in the blood, or in an obstruction in the abdomen which impedes the blood circulation, or in the degeneration of the ovaries, and the like."

[6] CW, 5: In cases of decadence, "the instincts are weakened. What one ought to shun is found attractive. One puts to one's lips what drives one yet faster into the abyss. Is an example desired? One only need observe the regimen that those suffering from anemia or gout or diabetes prescribe for themselves."

[7] Nietzsche sometimes seems to think that the predisposition to decadence is a biological characteristic of certain types of people. TI, "Skirmishes," 36: "Incidentally, however contagious pessimism is, it still does not increase the sickliness [*Krankhaftigkeit*] of an age, of a generation as a whole: it is an expression of this sickliness. One falls victim to it as one falls victim to cholera: one has to be morbid enough in one's whole predisposition. Pessimism itself does not create a single decadent more..." (By "sickliness," he means *predisposition to illness*, and not the quality of being ill, or the degree to which one is ill. After all, one's *sickness* can get worse, as he himself appears to suggest.)

For Nietzsche the primary bearers of decadence are individuals and cultures. But Nietzsche often uses the term in a more metonymic sense to describe worldviews, as well as the cultural creations animated by these worldviews (e.g., works of art, doctrinal religions, philosophies), which get produced by decadents and are attractive to decadents.[8] Wagner's operas and the New Testament are thus decadent in this more derivative sense. It is important to bear this in mind, since we often tend to think of things the other way around: To use our colloquial concept of decadence for a moment, we often think in the first instance of things (e.g., foie gras) or worldviews (e.g., sexual hedonism) as decadent, and the people who are drawn to them as decadent derivatively. But according to Nietzsche, we cannot infer a person's decadence from characteristically decadent behaviors, since the same behavior can count as decadent for one person and not for another. Being drawn to Wagner's music, for example, is typically a manifestation of decadence, but not in the case of one, such as Nietzsche himself, who is able to turn this "questionable and dangerous" music to his advantage (EH, "Clever," 6).[9]

From the way that Nietzsche characterizes things, it may then seem that decadence in the case of individuals is something akin to a medical condition. But though it is similar to a medical condition–maybe even is one–it is important to remember that Nietzsche's account of what individual decadence involves is independent of his biological speculations. Whether or not one agrees with the highly questionable etiology of decadence that Nietzsche gives (namely,

[8] Within this derivative sense, there would appear to be a further divide: some things get the moniker "decadent" for causal and/or dispositional reasons. They are produced by and/or attractive to decadent people. Others also warrant the moniker by manifesting the typical stylistic defects of decadence in their immanent qualities. This is particularly true of works of art (e.g., Wagner's) and worldviews (e.g., liberal individualism). Although there will be considerable overlap, we should keep in mind that these will not always be coextensive.

[9] Nietzsche's self-description is a bit more nuanced: "Apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the opposite. My proof for this is, among other things, that I have always instinctively chosen the *right* means against wretched states; while the decadent typically chooses means that are disadvantageous for him. As *summa summarum,* I was healthy; as an angle, as a speciality, I was a decadent." Nietzsche's point, I take it, is that although he shares certain characteristics with decadents, at core he is not decadent. (EH, "Wise," 2).

that it is the result of physiological degeneration), we can still see it as a certain kind of flaw which can afflict individuals and cultures. It is on characterizing this flaw that I will now focus. As I argue in the next section, Nietzsche conceives of decadence as, at core, a particular kind of *formal* failing.

III. Decadence as Dis-order

One of the best, if quite metaphorical, characterizations of decadence that we get in Nietzsche's works comes by way of an analogy to the arts. "Every style" of decadence, he thinks, resembles that of the decadent work of literature. He writes:

> I dwell this time only on the question of style[10]– What is the sign of every *literary decadence*? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole–the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the simile [*Gleichniss*] of every style of *decadence*: every time, the anarchy of atoms, the disgregation [*Disgregation*][11] of the will, "freedom of the individual," to use moral terms–expanded into a political theory, "*equal* rights for all." Life, *equal* vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life pushed back into the smallest forms; the rest, *poor* in life. Everywhere paralysis *[Lähmung*], hardship [*Mühsal*], torpidity [*Erstarrung*] *or* hostility [*Feindschaft*] and chaos: both more and more obvious the higher one ascends in

[10] This is my translation of "*Ich halte mich dies Mal nur bei der Frage des Stils auf.*" Walter Kaufmann renders this: "For the present I merely dwell on the question of *style.*" Despite the italics (which are not Nietzsche's) on "style," this way of rendering the sentence–in particular the "merely"–understates the importance of style to Nietzsche's account of decadence. It is in formal, structural terms that Nietzsche explains individual and cultural decadence.

[11] "Disgregation" is a scientific term, referring to the degree to which the molecules in a body are separated from one another.

> forms of organization. The whole no longer lives at all: it is composite [*zusammengesetzt*], calculated, artificial, and artifact (CW, 7).[12]

Decadence, as is evident from this passage, involves an organizational failure at the level of the whole. Perhaps in some trivial sense, whenever elements are put together, there is always a whole of some kind that they compose. But Nietzsche's claim is that in cases of decadence, there is not an *integrated* whole, a whole with "organic unity."[13] This failure of unity, as Nietzsche suggests, is due, if not to an outright "anarchy of atoms," (a lack of any organization at all) then to the tyrannical overtaking of the relevant whole by some part of it (a failure, again, of cohesive integration)–the word, as he says, "becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning [*Sinn*] of the page." On the alternative to decadence that Nietzsche would seem to be implying, a whole is at its best when the parts work in unison. This emphasis on integration is a recurrent theme in his work and a recurrent theme

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[12] As several commentators have noted, this passage is lifted by Nietzsche, with no citation and with only slight modification, from Paul Bourget's essay "Théorie de la décadence" in Bourget (1993) [1883], p. 14. (Thanks to Chris Sykes for first drawing my attention to this.) See Betram (1918), p. 231; Kaufmann (1950), p. 73; Moore (2002), p. 120. Bourget writes, for example, "Si l'énergie des cellules devient indépendante, les organismes qui composent l'organisme total cessent pareillement de subordonner leur énergie à l'énergie totale, et l'anarchie qui s'établit constitue la décadence de l'ensemble" and "Un style de décadence est celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l'indépendance du mot," p. 14. [If the energy of the cells becomes independent, the organisms which compose the total organism likewise cease to subordinate their energy to the total energy, and the anarchy that gets established constitutes the decadence of the whole / A style of decadence is one where the unity of the book decomposes, ceding its place to the independence of the sentence, and the sentence ceding its place to the independence of the word.]

[13] The term "organic unity" may be misleading in this context. Nietzsche in this passage is thinking of organic unity in a more classical sense, rather than in the Moorean sense that may be more familiar in contemporary philosophy. (See G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (1993) [1903] esp. §18). The latter Moorean view is a kind of axiological holism according to which the value had by the whole needn't simply be the sum of the values of the parts; Nietzsche's view is instead the statement of an ethical *ideal*: that it is of prime importance for a relevant whole (a person, a culture) to be integrated.

in the philosophical tradition more generally: in order to flourish, someone or something must achieve a certain kind of unity.[14]

But two things should be noted. First, this emphasis on unity does not mean that all parts are to be thought of as on an equal footing. Nietzsche, in his mocking reference to "'*equal* rights for all'" (CW, 7), seems to be denying just that. Some sentences, to continue with his example, can be more elegant or more incisive than others, and this is fine, so long as the sentences fit with the whole of which they are part. The *context* of the whole matters a great deal here: A novel can become worse by its author thoughtlessly peppering it with individually elegant sentences that stand out as so. Or, to use another artistic example, a play can be made much worse by a talented leading man who insists on upstaging everyone else, to such an extent that the play as a whole suffers. Second, Nietzsche's emphasis on unity and working in unison does not mean that relationships of domination and subordination are absent. Nietzsche, in metaphorically characterizing decadence as a kind of political anarchy, seems to suggest that what the decadent organism lacks is just this sort of regimentation. (As we shall see in our case study in the next section, the line between, on the one hand, the domination necessary for the organization he admires, and on the other hand, the tyranny he is here criticizing is a subtle one that cannot be drawn along wholly non-evaluative lines. It matters what element of the self (or class of the culture) is in the dominant position.)

Now what sorts of decadent things are here being characterized? The phrase "every style [*Stil*] of *decadence*" admits of a narrower and a broader reading: (a) The narrower reading is that Nietzsche is just talking about the style of decadence as manifested in artistic forms (painting,

[14] See, in particular, GS, 290 on the individual and UM, I:1 on the culture. A very good discussion of the importance of unity in Nietzsche's work can be found in Gemes (2001), Sect. III.

music, literature, etc.) alone. As classicism and Roccoco have their characteristic artistic styles, so too does decadence. The broader–and in my opinion, the right reading, as will be clear in what follows–is that Nietzsche is talking about a formal, stylistic defect that decadent artworks share with individuals and cultures. Using Nietzsche's account of "every style" of decadence from *The Case of Wagner*, we can take the general, if highly abstract, structural lessons we've gotten from this passage, and use them to try to make sense of the decadence of an individual and the decadence of a culture. To this I will turn in the next section and the one to follow.

IV. Individual Decadence as a Structural Failing

As we've seen, decadence at core consists in a failure of integration, manifested in the form either of anarchy or of tyranny, to use Nietzsche's political image.[15] Looking to the decadent person bears out this pattern. In the decadent, there is, Nietzsche thinks, an underlying failure of integration to begin with–an internal disorder, an "anarchy of atoms," in the terminology of CW, 7. Chaos reigns. In the midst of this anarchy, a drive (a part of the person) comes to power, promising the salvation of the whole organism. (Continuing with Nietzsche's political analogy, we might think of the way in which a self-aggrandizing dictator, vowing to restore law and order, comes to power in situations of political chaos.) The decadent, however, does not think his problem is a lack of integration in the self; he thinks it is something else.[16] For the strategy of this domineering drive that comes to power is to scapegoat some aspect of the decadent individual and to blame *that* for the decadent individual's "fallen" state.

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[15] Leiter rightly notes that Nietzsche takes decadent individuals to be those who, characteristically, have lost their instincts and want what is worst for them. Leiter (2002), p.158. But this, as I am arguing, is a *symptom* of decadence, not what the underlying problem consists in. This basic feature, as I spell out in what follows, is a lack of unity.

[16] Cf. Benson (2008), p. 10.

The "salvation" this drive proposes is to root out the allegedly offending element. (Again, the political analogy is helpful. Think of the dictator who blames all the social ills on some minority group and proposes a xenophobic or genocidal plan for their exclusion.) The decadent individual thus comes to think along these lines: "If only I could eliminate all my 'impure,' 'evil' sexual impulses, then I could be closer to God." "If only I could detach my soul from this copulating, urinating, and defecating animal body, I would attain perfect humanity." "If only I could get past the temptations of this life, I would have the most extreme bliss with God in heaven." And so on.

Notice, though, what is already evident in this way of thinking: The decadent individual starts out with some rift in the self, itself indicative of a failure of integration: He is his soul, *not* his animal body. His real desires are exalted religious ones, *not* worldly sexual ones. His real life is the one that awaits him in heaven, *not* the one he is leading on earth. This failure of integration only gets worse, for there turns out to be a vicious cycle within the decadent person. This domination of the organism by a particular part (the domineering drive) happens as the organism's defense mechanism in response to its preexisting decadence (the chaotic disunity in the self). Yet in the very process of trying to correct for this decadence, it grows *even more* decadent. Whereas at first there was anarchy, now there is tyranny.[17] One failure of integration is just exchanged for another, one brand of decadence for a different brand. In this respect, it is like the case of a smoker, who in order to quit never touches another cigarette, but to do so must

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[17] Nietzsche here alludes to Plato's regimes of the soul from the *Republic* in seeing democracy (which, for Plato, is a kind of anarchy) as preparing the ground for tyranny (562c5-6; 563e3-4). Nietzsche plays with this Platonic image by interpreting Socrates as the democratic man (the second-worst soul for Plato) who turns into the tyrannical man (the worst soul). Despite Nietzsche's criticism of Socrates as the archetypal decadent, there are interesting affinities here between Nietzsche (especially the political metaphors from CW, 7) and Plato. On Plato's view, in democracy freedom reigns supreme (562b-c), resulting in a kind of anarchy. "Horses and donkeys are in the habit of proceeding with complete freedom and dignity, bumping into anyone they meet on the road who does not get out of their way. And everything else is full of freedom, too" (563c6-d1).

cover his body in progressively more Nicoderm patches, so that he is getting even more nicotine than he was before. The "cure" perpetuates the underlying sickness–the addiction–in the very process of trying in vain to cure it.

In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche gives us an illustration of how this dynamic plays out in the person of Socrates. As an account of the historical Socrates or of Plato's character of that name, it is tendentious, to say the least. My aim is not to vindicate Nietzsche's understanding of Socrates on either score. But it will be helpful even so to dwell on this instructive example, for, regardless of whether all of Nietzsche's arrows find their target with Socrates, it is Nietzsche's most detailed account of the features characteristic of individual decadence and is worth focusing on to get clear on those features.

Socrates' instincts, Nietzsche thinks, are at first fundamentally in "anarchy" (TI, "Socrates," 4, 9). (A sign, thus, of his underlying decadence–the failure of cohesive unity within the self). Instead of corralling his unruly instincts by integrating them into a cohesive unity, the organism Socrates, in reaction to this chaos, finds something to blame: ignorance. All bad things come from not knowing enough. Salvation comes in *rationality*:

> ...Socrates is the archetype of the theoretical optimist whose belief that the nature of things can be discovered leads him to attribute to knowledge and understanding the power of a panacea, and who understands error to be inherently evil. To penetrate to the ground of things and to separate true knowledge [*wahre Erkenntniss*] from illusion and error was considered by Socratic man to be the noblest, indeed the only truly human vocation, just as, from Socrates onwards, the mechanism of concepts, judgments, and

> conclusions was prized, above all other abilities, as the highest activity and the most admirable gift of nature (BT, 15)

Socrates, to this end, develops "a *hypertrophy* of the logical faculty" [*Superfötation des Logischen*] that affects to save him from ignorance, but really, Nietzsche thinks, just acts as a tyrant, keeping the rest of Socrates in subjugation. (TI, "Socrates," 4).[18] Socrates doesn't just stop with himself either. He tries to convince others in Athens that being "*absurdly rational*" (TI, "Socrates," 10)–figuring out the essence of piety or justice–is eminently more important than any other human activity and indeed is the only route to the good life.[19] But as Nietzsche observes, "The fanaticism with which all Greek reflection throws itself upon rationality betrays a desperate situation" (TI, "Socrates," 10): Socrates becomes fanatically enamored of reason and dialectics because he cannot cope with his own unruly impulses for sex and competition, and the philosophical life of zealous rationality is just his reactive countermeasure.[20] Far from being his salvation, it just replaces one way of failing to be

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[18] "Superfötation" is Nietzsche's word here. It is in the spirit of the rest of the section that Kaufmann renders it as "hypertrophied," but this is not actually its scientific meaning. It refers to the condition when a female species is pregnant with multiple fetuses at different stages of development. One possible reading of this curious word choice is that Nietzsche is playing on (and questioning) Socrates' famous claim to be a midwife of thoughts–helping others give birth to their ideas but barren of ideas himself, *Theaetetus* 149a-151a. Socrates, Nietzsche might be suggesting, is much more pregnant with a multiplicity of ideas (one might also say "ideologies") than he affects to be, ideas which he then foists on his interlocutors.

[19] Though Nietzsche takes Socrates to task, Socrates would seem on some level actually to be doing just what Nietzsche recommends, spiritualizing or deifying a craving, rather than trying to "castrate" it–which Nietzsche takes to be the typical Christian (or, in this case, proto-Christian) solution. (See TI, "Morality as Anti-Nature," 1-2). He takes his agonistic and erotic impulses (of the sort, as Nietzsche says, that would be more healthily discharged in a "wrestling match between young men and youths") and presses them into the service of a respectable rational activity suited to his overgrown logical faculty–dialectical argument (TI, "Socrates," 8). Perhaps the issue for Nietzsche is that Socrates doesn't *acknowledge* these bodily impulses as part of what he fundamentally is. By Socrates' lights, *he* is his rational, eternal soul; the body, with its unruly appetites, is just a temporary residence. Cf., Nehamas (1998), p. 139: "By giving [reason] absolute preeminence, Socrates convinced us not to think we comprise many things, all of them equally part of what we are. Instead, he persuaded us to identify ourselves with this one impulse, to consider it the seat of the self, the mark of the human, and to distrust everything else about us as lower, degenerate, as features simply of the body or our fallen nature."

[20] Nietzsche implies as much in TI, "Socrates," 8.

integrated with another. Socrates' fight with decadence is fated from the start to be a losing battle, not only because he misidentifies the main target, but also, and more importantly, because his way of combatting decadence–allowing one part of himself (his rationality) to grow wildly out of proportion and to tyrannize the whole–drives him *even further* into decadence. This perverse mechanism that we see in Socrates exemplifies something true of decadents generally. Nietzsche writes:

> It is a self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists if they believe that they are extricating themselves from decadence when they merely wage war against it. Extrication lies beyond their strength: what they choose as a means, as salvation, is itself but another expression of decadence; they change its expression, but they do not get rid of the decadence itself. Socrates was a misunderstanding; *the whole improvement-morality, including the Christian, was a misunderstanding.* The most blinding daylight; rationality at any price; life, bright, cold, cautious, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts–all this too was mere disease, another disease, and by no means a return to "virtue," to "health," to happiness. To *have* to fight the instincts–that is the formula of decadence: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness equals instinct. (TI, "Socrates," 11)

Nietzsche in this passage uses "instinct" [*Instinkt*] in both its singular and its plural form, two times each. He is not always consistent with his terminology, and in this context, "instinct" (singular) and "instincts" (plural) make most sense when seen as referring to different things: "Instincts" are animalistic drives (though shaped somewhat as well by one's social

context). "Instinct" (as it is used in the singular here) is being able to act in a way that comes as second nature. Acting with instinct (in this sense) is not a matter of just letting impulses (instincts in the former sense) take their course; it is an ability one develops or achieves through painstaking work (Cf., BGE, 188). The non-decadent person is thus not someone just living out his impluses with wild abandon and happy in doing so. He is someone who has made a careful effort to cultivate these impulses in a particular way:

> He guesses what remedies avail against what is harmful; he exploits bad accidents to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger. He collects instinctively [*instinktiv*][21] from everything he sees, hears, lives through, *his* sum: he is a principle of selection, he leaves much to fall through [*lässt Viel durchfallen*]. He is always in his own company, whether he associates with books, human beings, or landscapes: he honors by choosing, by admitting, by trusting. (EH, "Wise," 2)

When Nietzsche complains about tyranny in the self, his brief is not against any imposition of order whatsoever. Tyranny involves domination, but the key features in making it tyranny are that the ruling element is unfit to rule and that the domination achieved is fundamentally unstable. Because of the first feature, the problem with tyranny, as I hinted at before, cannot be understood in wholly neutral, non-evaluative terms. Whereas Socrates wants reason to rule, Nietzsche wants a more creative, form-giving capacity to be at the helm of the

[21] It is not clear in which sense that I distinguished that Nietzsche is using "instinctively" here. Is it an innate capacity one has or a capacity acquired through some (and maybe a great) degree of painstaking cultivation? Or perhaps some combination of both?

soul–or at least whatever capacity he takes to be responsible, in place of reason, for the process described above.

Nietzsche's opposition to reason as the ruling element in the self might seem to lend support to the familiar charge that Nietzsche is an irrationalist. But we must bear in mind that it is reason in a narrower sense that Nietzsche would seem to have in his critical sights. It is reason in the sense of trying, in the relentless way that Socrates does, dialectically to justify virtually everything that he believes and holds dear. Nietzsche sees this enterprise as futile and perverse (TI, "Socrates," 5). But Nietzsche is not advocating that one behave *irrationally*, ignoring all considerations in favor of doing or believing things. What he does appear to think is that one's bases for doing what one does will not always be discursively formulable and intersubjectively justifiable, in a way that would suit Socrates. And unlike Socrates, Nietzsche does not regard this as a failing.

The second feature of tyranny is that the regimentation achieved is highly unstable. Because the decadent's characteristic emphasis is on extremes–extirpation, castration, repression–the suppressed elements, allowed no outlet at all, roil beneath the surface, growing in intensity, like a mob of outcasts, demonized by the government and ready to riot on the slightest provocation in order to make their voices heard. In the Nietzschean unified self, the emphasis is on moderation instead of extremes, incorporation instead of elimination, channeling impulses to productive goals instead of trying to eliminate them entirely. Contrasting his own position with that of the Christians, Nietzsche writes, "The church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its 'cure,' is castratism. It never asks: 'How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a craving?' It has at all times laid the stress of discipline on extirpation (of sensuality, of pride, of

the lust to rule, of avarice, of vengefulness)" (TI, "Morality as Anti-Nature," 1). The strategy of self-mastery that Nietzsche proposes lends greater stability to the self, because it involves finding a useful place within the self for certain elements, rather than trying to "purify" the self of them entirely.

I have so far focused on the case of Socrates, but we see a similar dynamic in the case of other archetypal decadents–Wagnerians, Schopehauerians, and Christians: a failure of holistic integration, itself a product of underlying decadence within the self, amounts to a part, promising salvation by extreme measures, coming to dominate in the person. The Wagnerian, for instance, can't accept the idea that real life is mostly prosaic–family dinners and walking the dog. "Real" life for him is a life of grand Romantic Wagnernian passion, of the sort that he experiences in the theater alone. The only moments he takes himself really to be alive are those when he is immersed in Wagner's music dramas and the exalted, heroic way of life they depict. Since the Wagnerian denies that most of life counts as serious living at all, he more and more comes to sustain himself on the (in Nietzsche's final verdict) ultimately fraudulent illusions that Wagner presents as the locus of true life. These illusions, working like a drug bringing a high, stimulate the nerves of sick Wagnerian decadents who are unable to cope with life without the help of this addictive medicine.

The Schopenhauerian cannot accept that life is a mixed bag of satisfaction and of suffering. For this supposedly unfortunate state of things, he blames his desires, not his own overly demanding conception of the good life as completely free from suffering. He fervently seeks, as his ascetic goal, not that his desires be moderated, but that they be extinguished, either temporarily (as happens during the activity of aesthetic contemplation) or more extremely

through a form of saintly resignation in which he can (allegedly) cease to will. The irony is that, even if one is not *intentionally* setting out to rid oneself of desires, as Schopenhauer thinks one cannot, this condemnation of the desires and praise for the ascetic ideal is ultimately premised on a tenacious background desire to be free from suffering. The philosopher who pays homage to the ascetic ideal in this way, Nietzsche says, is one who "wants *to gain release from a torture*" (GM, III: 6). Matters would be all right, on the desire satisfaction calculus, for the person who could eliminate willing entirely, for then the background desire would ultimately be satisfied. But desiring creatures that we are, this ideal is unreachable for us. Those who set such an ideal for themselves end up even more dissatisfied, not just because of their first-order desires, but because of their (probably unfulfillable) ascetic background desire that these first-order desires be rooted out. The Schopenhauerian is then beset not just with unsatisfied sexual urges, for instance, but also with the intense unsatisfied desire that these urges be entirely eliminated.

The Christian combines various features of these other decadents described: the Socratic identification of the self with an immortal soul, the Wagnerian aim to escape from this world and repair to another, the Schopenhauerian project of rooting out the desires for sex, power, and other worldly goods. Many decadents will combine various of these features. I have just so far tried to give archetypes. I won't go into these other cases in as much detail as I did with the case of Socrates for reasons of space, but they can be read, as I have tried to show, as hewing to the same fundamental pattern.

V. Cultural Decadence as a Structural Failing

Now that we've gotten a key example of what decadence amounts to in the case of the individual, where the relevant whole is the human being, what does it amount to beyond the individual level? With this quasi-medical understanding of individual decadence in the air, one might assume that when it comes to figuring out whether a culture as a whole is decadent, the explanation is to be cast in terms either of the people who populate it or, more derivatively, of the worldviews that enjoy popular support there (and which, like coughing and sneezing, are both symptoms of a disease and responsible for spreading it further to those who are susceptible). On the former view, a culture is decadent because it is populated by many individual decadents. A decadent culture would thus be decadent in the way an obese culture is obese. On the latter view, a culture is decadent because decadent worldviews hold sway there. A culture would thus be decadent in the way that Italy is a Catholic country, or the way in which Northern Europe, according to Max Weber, is infused with the Protestant Ethic. But we should resist these seemingly natural ways of understanding cultural decadence. To be sure, decadent worldviews and individuals often are *characteristic* of decadent cultures. But, if used as the sole guide to cultural decadence, they can yield a false positive: A probing health survey or anthropological study would not settle for Nietzsche the question of whether a culture *itself* is decadent. Renaissance Italy, we must not forget, is one of his recurrent examples of a flourishing

culture (TI, "Skirmishes," 44; A, 61) but, by the metrics proposed, since it was overwhelmingly a Christian place, it would seem to count as thoroughly decadent.[22]

Instead of adopting an aggregative understanding of cultural decadence, so that the decadence of a culture as a whole is fundamentally a function of the decadence of its members or of the worldviews that are ascendant there, we should, I want to suggest, rather see the relationship between individual and cultural decadence as one of individual microcosm to cultural macrocosm.[23] Nietzsche in this respect follows Plato, who in the *Republic* takes there to be an important structural analogy between the organization of the individual soul and the organization of the *kallipolis*.[24] In assessing whether a culture is decadent (or, by contrast, flourishing), we should thus be focused on that culture *as a whole*, to be judged in light of *its* unity.

Nietzsche's most suggestive remarks to this effect come relatively early in his career in the *Untimely Meditations*, where he writes that "[c]ulture is, above all, unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people." (UM, I:1).[25] Here Nietzsche is characterizing what a genuine *Kultur* (culture) would amount to, as opposed to the decadent variety (UM, I:2) that he sees as holding sway in Germany of the 1870s, epitomized in the works of David Strauss and the lives

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[22] One could try to press the "worldview" line with the argument that the worldview really animating the Italian Renaissance was one that was subtly moving away from the otherworldiness of Christianity and toward more sensuous, worldly values exemplified in the great art of the time (think, for example, of Michelangelo's muscular nudes). Nietzsche suggests as much himself about the worldview of Renaissance Italy in *The Antichrist* (61). But to describe this as the dominant worldview of the Italian Renaissance (in the aggregative senses) strikes me as almost as perverse as to describe the dominant one in the U.S. as secular. It seems highly unlikely that the average person during the Renaissance was inspired with this worldview. Nietzsche is more charitably interpreted as meaning that the *Renaissance itself* is somehow emblematic of these worldly values.

[23] Nietzsche presents these images of the culture as the macrocosm of the individual in HH, I:276 and BGE, 19.

[24] e.g., *Republic* 434d to 435a. Cp., Ahern (1995), p. 29.

[25] Note that Nietzsche uses "culture" both as a unvalorized sociological term and as a kind of valorized success term; a decadent culture (in the sociological sense) is one that fails to be a genuine culture (in the success term sense).

of the barbaric *Bildungsphilister* (cultivated Philistines) who read him.[26] Accepting the basic idea that a failure of unity is responsible for decadence, this "barbarism" Nietzsche describes as a "lack of style or a chaotic jumble of all styles" (UM, I:1).[27] So the decadent culture is the stylistically disunified culture.

But what would it be for the "life expressions" of a people to be stylistically unified in the way that Nietzsche is envisaging? He could be interpreted as putting his emphasis on artistic style manifested *in works of art proper*–paintings, buildings, works of music and the like.[28] (All classicism all the time, or something along those lines.) On this interpretation, it is *those* life expressions of a people that he is singling out and calling upon to be unified.[29] But Nietzsche's idea, as I read him, is instead that the culture is *itself* the object of artistic evaluation. This would of course include its symphonies and cathedrals, but it would also include, more broadly, its whole way of life *regarded* as a work of art. In the individual case, after all, Nietzsche does not admire Goethe simply for his writings. He also admires Goethe, along with other great individuals, for the artworks that they, in some sense, *themselves are*.[30] His images for cultures, similarly, suggest that he is admiring them not just for the more conventional sorts of art that they produce (though for that too), but as potentially magnificent works of art themselves:

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[26] Though Nietzsche had not yet started using the term "décadence," the idea is the same.

[27] "The culture of a people as the antithesis to this barbarism was once, and I think with a certain justice defined as unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people; this definition should not be misunderstood in the sense of implying an antithesis between barbarism and *fine* style; what is meant is that a people to whom one attributes a culture has to be in all reality a single living unity and not fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form. He who wants to strive for and promote the culture of a people should strive for and promote this higher unity and join in the destruction of modern bogus cultivatedness for the sake of a true culture..." (UM, II:4).

[28] Burckhardt 1979: 118.

[29] Gossman 2000: 259-271.

[30] An ideal of life for Nietzsche is turning one's life as a whole into a work of art, becoming, in his image, the poet of one's life. (Cf. GS, 299; Cf., GS, 290). See Nehamas (1985), Ch. 6; Ridley (2007), esp. p. 84-88. For explicit comparison between the great individual and the great culture, see Blondel (1986), p. 71.

culture, he suggests, is "a great edifice" (GS, 356). This excellence as works of art, as we saw in Chapter 1, characterizes the best cultures for Nietzsche, the ones whose excellence he lauds time and again: the Homeric Greek culture, the Roman Empire, and the Italian Renaissance. They are, as he says about Rome, "work[s] of art in the grand style" (A, 58) whose justification is aesthetic–namely, their own resplendent existence. Nietzsche, as he so often can be, is tantalizingly vague about the details, but, so far as I can tell, he seems to think that cultures are–*avant la lettre*–massive pieces of performance art, to a large degree unconsciously produced. He of course didn't have available the notion of performance art, so the images that he gives tend to be more static (drawing especially on literature in the case of the individual (GS, 299) and architecture in the case of the culture (GS, 356)).

When cultures become decadent–when they lose the unity that great works of art have–they cannot be excellent artistic "objects" (or, more properly perhaps, artistic "events").[31] Yet in the case of both individuals and cultures, Nietzsche never endorses the implausible view that *simply* being unified is enough.[32] Unity, he suggests, is very important. But it is a necessary and not a sufficient condition; it matters *what elements* are being unified as well and the underlying quality of those elements. Exactly what this unity consists in is difficult to say. What matters for the present purposes is this: a decadent individual and a decadent culture, in lacking unity, lack one of the most important preconditions for their flourishing. It is a precondition both instrumentally and constitutively. It is an instrumental precondition because Nietzsche thinks

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[31] This may conflict with the sensibilities of some nowadays about what is required for a great work of art. Although most of us regard unity as important, some might think it is not completely obvious that the lack of integration precludes something from being a great work of art. But Nietzsche himself is more classical in his tastes in prizing unity as of indispensable importance. Bäumler (1931) emphasizes this unity condition when it comes to cultures, p. 123.

[32] UM, I:2. In the case of individuals too, Nietzsche takes unity to be of tremendous importance. (Cf., BGE, 290). But he does not in this famous passage from *The Gay Science* or elsewhere suggest that it is a sufficient condition for individual greatness or flourishing, even if it is a necessary condition.

that a certain internal hierarchy is necessary in order for a person or culture to flourish. But it is also constitutive because *having* this social structure (or, more figuratively, this social structure of the soul) is *part of what it is* to flourish on Nietzsche's view.

VI. The Unfortunate Legacy of Decadence

In offering the reading that I have, my concern has been to try to rehabilitate the concept of decadence philosophically–to extricate it from Nietzsche's biologistic speculation, to elucidate the unusual technical sense in which Nietzsche uses it, and to show that it is more central to Nietzsche's thought than scholars of Nietzsche have often supposed. But I offer this reading also as a way of trying to rehabilitate the concept historically. After all, it is just this sort of rhetoric about decadence that could be thought to play right into the hands of those wanting the "purification" and "salvation" of Germany. (No doubt another reason the concept of decadence is thought by many enlightened readers of Nietzsche to be something that is best ignored). However, as I shall suggest, rather than playing into the hands of the Nazis, it in fact delivers a telling indictment of them. (Which is not to say that the social philosophy Nietzsche builds around the concept of decadence is one ringed with rosy moral consequences; quite the contrary.)

Nietzsche again and again characterizes individual decadence in biological terms– as a kind of physiological degeneration. But we should not let this force us to the aggregative conclusion at the cultural level: namely that cultural decadence is a problem with there being too many "sickly" or decadent people (or too many of the decadent books they write or too much of the decadent music they compose) "polluting" the cultural landscape, and, accordingly,

that cultural decadence could be remedied by a thorough program of elimination. Now, it bears noting that Nietzsche himself can sometimes give just this impression. In a passage entitled "*Morality for Physicians*," (TI, "Skirmishes," 36) he writes:

> The sick man is a parasite of society. In a certain state it is indecent to live longer. To go on vegetating in cowardly dependence on physicians and machinations, after the meaning of life, the right to life, has been lost, that ought to prompt a profound contempt in society. The physicians, in turn, would have to be the mediators of this contempt–not prescriptions, but every day a new dose of nausea with their patients. To create a new responsibility, that of the physician, for all cases in which the highest interest of life, of ascending life, demands the most inconsiderate pushing down and aside of *degenerating* life [*rücksichtsloseste Nieder- und Beiseite-Drängen des* entartenden *Lebens*]–for example, for the right of procreation, the right to be born, the right to live.[33]

[33] The sentence simply ends in this fragmentary way. It is important to note that he goes on immediately to add in the next sentence: "To die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death freely chosen, death at the right time, brightly and cheerfully accomplished amid children and witnesses: then a real farewell is possible..." (Cf., TSZ, I, "On Free Death"). Notice, however, it is a "death freely chosen," not imposed on one by society. His only *explicit* advice to the physician is to administer "a new dose of nausea" to goad the patients along. In the final paragraph of this section, Nietzsche offers his advice for "our dear pessimists and other decadents." They insist that life on this earth is something we would have been better off never having lived, or a vale of tears on the way to a better beyond, or a disease from which we must be released. Yet he points to the tension between the fact that they hold life in such contempt and yet they refuse to kill themselves or offer themselves immediately up to death. (They of course give various *ad hoc* reasons for not doing so...) Now I don't think Nietzsche is trying to convince them all to commit mass suicide. But what Nietzsche finds particularly galling is that they are not content to stew in their own silent and solitary life hatred. They are instead like the people in a foul mood who rather than staying home from a party *go anyway* and insist on ruining it for those who are having fun. It is in this light that we should construe what he has in mind when he says, "[w]hen one *does away with* oneself [sich *abschafft*], one does the most estimable thing possible: one almost earns the right to live. Society–what am I saying–life itself derives more advantage from this than from any 'life' of renunciation, anemia, and other virtues: one has liberated the others from one's sight; one has liberated life from an objection" (TI, "Skirmishes," 36).

Yet it is worth noting here that *if* Nietzsche is advocating the elimination of these sick, degenerating decadents–and it is far from clear that he is–what he says is profoundly ironic. For if we are attentive to the basic structural analogy between individual and cultural decadence that Nietzsche has established, we will recognize that this drive for elimination is *itself* a manifestation of decadence. To seek to extirpate decadent parts is not to transfigure and incorporate them into a cohesive whole, which is fundamentally what achieved unity requires. It's a good thing, Nietzsche points out, that most Christians don't live up to their own barbaric advice to "pluck out" the eye that offends them; we no longer, as he says, admire dentists who yank out teeth so that they will not hurt any more. (TI, "Morality," 1). This extreme desire for "extirpation" or "castration" of a part of the self is fundamentally a decadent response, a sign of those who are too "weak-willed" to manage anything else (ibid., 2).

Seen in the light of this analogy to the individual, the Nazis' "Final Solution"–the plan of exterminating those they took to be degenerates or decadents and of consigning their books to the flames–was not a route to cultural rejuvenation; it was a telling symptom of their culture's terminal decadence. The German *Volk*, as Nietzsche presciently stresses, are the ones who are degenerate at core–not the Jews. Excoriating the rising tide of German nationalist anti-Semitism, Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* cleverly turns the Germans' twisted claim that the Jews are "polluting" their "pure" German blood back on them: the Germans' desire to live in a country free of Jews is the "instinct of a people whose type is still weak and indefinite, so it could be easily blurred or extinguished by a stronger race. The Jews, however, are beyond any doubt the strongest, toughest, and purest race now living in Europe" (251). They are, as Nietzsche says in *The Antichrist*, "the antithesis of all decadents." (A, 24). As with decadent individuals, the

"cure" that decadent cultures seek, as Nietzsche's model makes clear, is one that involves the scapegoating of innocents and one that both manifests and exacerbates the underlying decadence of the culture in question.

VII. Conclusion

History aside, supposing there *are* decadent individuals, as Nietzsche surely thought there were, what can a culture "do" with them? Once we see cultural decadence in the way I have set it out here, we will realize that a culture can flourish *despite* the pervasive decadence of most of its members and *despite* the prevalence of the decadent worldviews they endorse. Indeed, the structural analogy to the individual suggests that if a culture will flourish, it will do so *in virtue* of using the underlying decadence of its members toward some unified project for the good of the whole. Nietzsche's underlying metaphor is one of *achieved* unity at the level of the whole that we get from observing the microcosm of the person. After all, on the individual level, Nietzsche praises great individuals for their unity in *multiplicity*–they are something "capable of being as manifold as whole, as ample as full" (BGE, 212). Unity is not uniformity. We should take our lesson for the macrocosm from the microcosm, most especially from Nietzsche's favorite example of a person who has overcome the threat of decadence: namely, *himself*. In his autobiography *Ecce Homo* he writes, "Apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the opposite. My proof for this is, among other things, that I have always instinctively chosen the *right* means against wretched states; while the decadent typically chooses means that are disadvantageous for him" (EH, "Wise," 2). Faced with constant, tormenting sickness that would have debilitated many, Nietzsche did not succumb to self-pity. He instead stakes a claim

on this seemingly unfortunate aspect of his life, transfiguring it into the route for his philosophical creativity. He says, characteristically, "In the midst of the torments that go with an uninterrupted three day migraine, accompanied by laborious vomiting of phlegm, I possessed a dialectician's clarity *par excellence* and thought through with very cold blood matters for which under healthier circumstances I am not mountain climber, not subtle, not *cold* enough" (EH, "Wise," 1). In the Nietzschean great individual, "even weaknesses delight the eye" insofar as they are integrated into a beneficial role in the "artistic plan" of the self (GS, 290).

A flourishing culture, this would suggest, does not try to eliminate decadent individuals or those it perceives to be decadent; "it" integrates them, putting them in the service of a greater cultural end. This is not to attribute a strong sense of agency to the culture here, as if the culture "chooses" to use the people in this way. The view is instead that in the ideal culture, things just are cohesively integrated in such a way that what people do ends up being in the service of the whole. As I read Nietzsche, this actually is not a point of divergence from the individual case: individuals are "free," on his understanding of freedom, not in virtue of their capacity to make causally-undetermined choices (to be, as it were, the homunculus in the command center), but in virtue of being an integrated "totality" or "unity," where the parts work in unison. Freedom, in Nietzsche's unusual sense, is an achievement on the part of the exemplary few, not a metaphysical capacity that humans in general possess.

Whether or not the decadent members of a culture consciously work to create a culture, they can nonetheless manage to do so. In their individual decadence, they are unwittingly the base on which a flourishing culture can be built. Perhaps they are lugging the stones to build the Duomo in Florence, or they are making Michelangelo's pasta. The Italian Renaissance, in one

sense, was carried on the back of a few great individuals, the creative artists and daring intellectuals who produced its best works. They made it the rich, creatively fertile time it was. But it was also, we must not forget, built on the "scaffolding" (BGE, 258) of many devoutly Christian *decadents*, the toiling workers whose "slavery" created the conditions for that artistic and intellectual flowering. Indeed their decadence in endorsing Christianity may have been essential in coaxing them into the subservient role they needed to play. "A high culture is a pyramid," Nietzsche writes, "it can stand only on a broad base; its first presupposition is a strong and soundly consolidated mediocrity" (A, 57). On some level despite their individual decadence, and on some level because of it, these "slaves" ("in some sense or other" (BGE, 257)) helped make the Renaissance possible. Their individual contributions were not as indispensable as those of Raphael or Michelangelo. But they were, in their small way, important still. These are important issues that we will return to in the final chapter. In the next few chapters, I will turn to discuss Nietzsche's understanding of morality and his grounds for criticizing it.

Chapter 4:
The Genealogy of Morality

I. Introduction

In his brilliant and often invective-laden treatise *On The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche purports to reveal the real genesis of "morality." In speaking of "morality" as a contingent human institution with a beginning, Nietzsche is not using "morality" as most moral philosophers do. He is not picking out with that term how *in fact* one should live and what one ought to do. His use of the word is instead more descriptive and anthropological. He has in mind by "morality" a cluster of specific views *about* these fundamental ethical issues–views which have been ascendant in the last two thousand years or so of the West.[1] I shall begin by explaining the way in which the morality that is the focus of Nietzsche's genealogy is a conventional, historical entity in this way.

According to the account that Nietzsche presents in the first essay of the *Genealogy*, this new value system–morality–comes to supplant the previously dominant "noble" value system of the ancients as the result of a seminal event that Nietzsche calls "the slave revolt" (GM, I:10). Nietzsche spins a vivid tale of this revolt. The first part of the chapter will be devoted to trying to understand Nietzsche's narrative on its own terms: Who are the characters in the story that he tells? What are their respective motives? What accounts for the victory of the triumphant group and the defeat of the vanquished? However we come to regard Nietzsche's story–as serious history, fanciful allegory, ungrounded speculation, well-crafted rhetorical device, or

[1] "With a stiff seriousness that inspires laughter, all our philosophers demanded something far more exalted, presumptuous and solemn from themselves as soon as they approached the study of morality: they wanted to supply a *rational foundation* for morality...How remote from their clumsy pride was that task which they considered insignificant and left in the dust and must–the task of description–although the subtlest fingers and senses can scarcely be subtle enough for it" (BGE, 186).

some combination of these–it is worthwhile to begin by working out the details of the narrative itself.

But we will also want to ask about this story's ambitions of accuracy. Nietzsche announces in the "Preface" to the *Genealogy* that he is looking "in the direction of an actual *history of morality*" (7). But what should we make of this claim to historicity? Even if Nietzsche's account is, in *some* way, aiming to reveal the historical truth about morality's origins, how much of his story is supposed to be taken as literal historical fact? I shall take up these questions in the second part of the chapter.

II. The Relevant Sense of Morality

Nietzsche uses the term "morality" in a way that is less than precise.[2] At a few points in his work, he uses it quite broadly to mean any system of non-prudential normative guidance about how one should conduct one's life and one's relations with others.[3] But more often, he uses the term "morality" more narrowly as the name for a particular family of views that rise in social prominence during the long span of time between the birth of Christianity and the fall of

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[2] Nietzsche's most frequent term is "*Moral*." He also uses "*Moralität*," and occasionally (e.g., D, 103) "*Sittlichkeit*." The last can be confusing because Nietzsche distinguishes morality (in one sense of the term) from the pre-moral system of customs, which he calls the "morality of custom" [*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*] (GM, II:2; D, 9).

[3] Nietzsche, for example, writes: "*Morality in Europe today is herd animal morality*–in other words, as we understand it, merely *one* type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other types, above all *higher* moralities, are, or ought to be, possible" (BGE, 202). Here he would appear to be using "morality" in two senses at once, in a narrower sense when he refers to it as the morality that holds sway in Europe, in a broader sense when he refers to it as just one type of human morality among others. The narrower sense is far more frequent in Nietzsche's work, and that is how I will use the term "morality" here. (Yet, as we shall see, to say even of this narrower sense that it is "one" type of morality can also be a misleadingly imprecise locution, because it suggests a unity that this morality lacks.) When Nietzsche uses the term in the narrower sense, his use is in some ways similar to that of Bernard Williams (1985)–no doubt himself inspired by Nietzsche–who takes morality to be a historically-contingent "system" and a "peculiar institution." Rather than seeing morality and ethics as one and the same, Williams sees morality as one branch of ethics. Nietzsche does not systematically draw this distinction himself in his terminology, though something like it is implicitly there, in the distinction between morality in the narrower sense and morality in the broader sense that we find in BGE, 202. This ethics/morality divide in Nietzsche's work is the guiding theme of May (1999).

the Roman Empire.[4] It is the latter sense that is at issue when Nietzsche conceives of morality as something that comes into being at a particular time in history.

But what is this thing morality? Given its protean character, it resists a neat definition. Although in its archetypal form this morality is intimately bound up with the tenets of the Christian religion, it branches and persists in various secularized inheritors. Kantian ethics and Benthamite utilitarianism, as far apart as they are, are both, in Nietzsche's eyes, parts of this same morality family. It might then be more apt to describe "morality," even in the narrower sense that picks out an historical entity, as a collection of loosely-related worldviews (or "moralities" in the plural) rather than what we might think of as a rigorous and consistent first-order normative system.[5]

Moreover, it is important to see that these moralities, as Nietzsche understands them, are not just a series of rules to be obeyed, but are a constellation of related ideals, values, and so on– in short, a whole outlook on life–as Christianity or secular liberal humanism are. (Of Christianity, for example, Nietzsche writes that it is "the most prodigal elaboration of the moral theme to which humanity has ever been subjected" (BT, "Attempt," 5)). At the most general level, these moralities that comprise morality (in the historical sense) will typically include the following as a package:

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[4] There are the stirrings of this new morality system in the ethical views of Socrates and Plato. But at least according to Nietzsche's central historical argument in the First Essay of the *Genealogy*, the birth of the morality system is coterminous with the rise of Christianity. Christianity of course doesn't develop in a vacuum; it draws on this Platonic heritage, and appeals to the masses as a kind of "Platonism for 'the people.'" (BGE, "Preface").

[5] For a characterization of what commitments Nietzsche takes this value "system," hodgepodge that it is, to involve, see Leiter (2002), Chs. 3 and 4, and Geuss (1999a). Both Leiter (p. 77) and Geuss (p. 167) rightly stress Nietzsche's anti-essentialism about morality. It should not be viewed as a failing on Nietzsche's part that he does not define the morality he is attacking precisely. He does not think it is the sort of phenomenon that *can* or *should* be defined precisely. On this latter point, see GM, II:13, where Nietzsche writes, "...all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable."

(1) **norms**, which prescribe things and proscribe others;

(2) a **meta-norm**, according to which its norms are universal in scope and overriding in importance;

(3) **valuations and assessments** (e.g., that the suffering of sentient creatures is bad, that all human beings are of equal worth and dignity, that people deserve to be punished for the wrongs they "freely" do; that the only thing unqualifiedly good is "the good will");

(4) **ideals** informed by these valuations about what sort of lives are most worth leading (e.g., to live a life that is as free as possible of suffering, to live a life of saintly abnegation, or to live a life of devoted altruism);[6]

(5) **associated descriptive beliefs** (e.g., that human beings have free will in a metaphysically strong sense; that the human soul is immortal).

But, as the varied parenthetical examples I have just given will suggest, when we get to the substantive commitments among various branches of this unruly thing "morality," it can be difficult to find much agreement. Consider the deontological moral norms suggested by Kant as opposed to the utilitarian ones offered by Bentham, or think of the tremendous importance of pity in Schopenhauer's moral philosophy in contrast to its relative lack of importance in Kant's. Morality, if taken to be a unitary thing, would seem to be rife with internecine disagreement. But the singularity of the term "morality" is especially misleading here. I'll continue to use the term "morality" in the singular, as Nietzsche most often does, but we must bear in mind that

[6] There may not be a hard-and-fast line between "norms" and "ideals." One way of drawing the line would be to see "ideals" as hortatory, but not as mandatory. But then again, there are probably some norms by which certain things are "strongly discouraged" rather than outright impermissible or by which some actions are "above and beyond the call of duty" (i.e., supererogatory) rather than mandatory.

this term, even in its narrower sense, is meant to capture the moral thinking of philosophers as different as Kant, John Stuart Mill, and St. Augustine.

It can seem very odd that Nietzsche lumps these together under one term, since it is difficult to see what unites them.[7] He does, as I have suggested, take them to share a common ancestry. But even if true, this ambitious sociological claim does little to help us pick out the contours of this concept "morality." The best way to cast a net over Nietzsche's rather diffuse target "morality" is to notice the paradigmatic philosophical moralizers at whom Nietzsche levels criticism. The main targets are:

1) Kant (BGE, 187; A, 11-12);

2) Christians, e.g., St. Paul or Thomas Aquinas (A, 42; GM, I:15);

3) Utilitarians, e.g. Bentham and Mill (BGE, 44; TI, "Maxims," 12;);

4) Schopenhauer (BGE, 186; GM, "Preface," 5; A, 7);

5) Socrates and Plato (BGE, "Preface"; BGE, 190; TI, "Socrates");[8]

6) "Enlightened" "secular" progressives, e.g. George Eliot (TI, "Skirmishes," 5).

As our loose working understanding of "morality," in Nietzsche's sense, we might then say that it is a family of worldviews, offering themselves as guides to what is valuable and to how human

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[7] One idea, proposed in Prescott-Couch (forthcoming), is that morality is not a functional kind, but rather an *historical individual*. While I strongly agree that morality is an historical kind of some sort, I prefer to think of morality as analogous to the family as opposed to the individual for the reasons I outline above.

[8] As I've already mentioned, there is a tension here with Nietzsche's own account of when morality began. The best way to resolve this tension, in keeping with his terminology, is to see Socrates and Plato as *proto*-moralists, who retrospectively become part of the moral tradition because of what their views lead to with Christianity and its secular offspring (BGE, "Preface"). Nietzsche is loose enough with his terminology that it is not worthwhile for us to spend too long trying to figure out whether Socrates and Plato "really" belong to the moral or proto-moral tradition.

life must be conducted, which are in the spirit of the moral thought of one or more of these figures. As should be clear from what I have said so far, there is no unified thing "morality" that is the conjunction of these views. Excepting some moral philosophers whose intuitions have been brought into line with their own theories, the "commonsensical" morality that a given person endorses in late 19th century Europe (or today, for that matter) is likely not going to be a doctrinaire version of any one of these. It is instead likely going to be a hodgepodge of disparate, perhaps internally inconsistent strands, drawn from these different moral traditions we have inherited. I now want to turn to Nietzsche's account of how this morality arose.

III. Understanding the Slave Revolt

Nietzsche's genealogical account proceeds by characterizing the interests and motivations of three basic groups that he sees as at the epicenter of the slave revolt: the nobles, "the priestly people," and the slaves. The first thing to note is that are indeed *three* groups. It can be tempting to subsume the "priestly people" into the class of slaves and thus to collapse these three groups into two. Yet while the "priestly people" of the First Essay are in some respects deserving of that slavish classification–for example, in that they are beneath the nobles in the political hierarchy (GM, I:6) and in that they lack physical prowess (GM, I:7)–they are also, in Nietzsche's eyes, importantly different from the mass of ordinary slaves.[9] In fact, they share important similarities with the nobles in their aristocratic bearing and in the particularly deep

[9] Several commentators have rightly stressed that there is this trio of importantly different players in the slave revolt. See Wallace (2007), p. 123-4; Reginster (1997); Hatab (2008), p. 40; Conway (2008), p. 36. Although Anderson (2011), in rightly stressing the noble characteristics of the priests, avoids collapsing the slaves and the priests into one group, his account may go to far in the other direction by combining the nobles and the priests into one group–seeing the priests as simply a certain species of noble.

craving that they have for power (their "lust to rule") (GM, I:6).[10] Yet although these "priestly people" long for supremacy, they are "impotent," and thus, Nietzsche implies, unable to attain this supremacy in a direct fight (GM, I:7).[11] It is important to see them as this intermediate class, having affinities with noble and slave alike.[12]

This conflation of the categories of slave and priest can lead one to think that the slaves themselves are the instigators of the rebellion that bears their name.[13] But such a reading is in serious tension with Nietzsche's view about the relative docility of most people. For at the foundation of this slave revolt is the creation of new values through the revaluation of old values (GM, I:10). These new values denigrate the traits of the nobles and valorize those of the slaves (GM, I:13). Yet the common people, Nietzsche appears to think, are too passive for such an ambitious axiological endeavor. As he puts the point in the predecessor work to the *Genealogy*–*Beyond Good and Evil*–most people prefer to accept ready-made opinions of themselves: "...since time immemorial, in all somehow dependent social strata the common man *was* only what he was *considered*: not at all used to positing values himself, he also attached no other value to himself than his masters attached to him (it is the characteristic *right of masters* to create values)" (BGE, 261). The slave revolt does not mark a change in this fundamental docility,

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[10] Reginster (1997), p. 288; Anderson (2011) has presented the most sustained account of the nobility of the Nietzschean priestly class.

[11] Wallace (2007), p. 122-3.

[12] It is a more delicate interpretive question whether the "priestly people" or "priests" of the First Essay are the priests of the Third Essay. Staten (1988), Ch. 2, seems to think they are. For further discussion of this issue, see Ridley (1998), Ch. 2. There are certainly affinities and points of overlap, but the priests of the Third Essay, as I read Nietzsche, fulfill (and continue to fulfill) a clerical or ministerial social occupation (GM, III:15). The priests of the First Essay are a broader social group, encompassing more than those with this particular occupation. Yet, unlike the priests of the Third Essay, who continue to perpetuate the ascetic ideal today, the "priestly people" of the First Essay play the role they do at a particular period in history. Nietzsche identifies the priests of the First Essay with the Jews who were struggling under the yoke of the Roman Empire (GM, I:7).

[13] This is a common–and, I think, mistaken–interpretation. Among its proponents are Bittner (1994); Ridley (1998), p. 17; Leiter (2002), p. 193-4; Pippin (2004), p. 54; Owen (2007), p. 80; Janaway (2007), p. 92, 100.

which Nietzsche takes to continue still: For "even now the ordinary man still always *waits* for an opinion about himself and then instinctively submits to that..." (BGE, 261).[14] Nietzsche is clear that the priests, by contrast, *do* have the capacity to revalue values (GM I: 7-8). It is these "the priestly people" who forge the values that then get taken up by slaves and nobles alike. Because this new value system is designed with an eye toward the taste of the slaves, Nietzsche refers to it as a "slave morality" [*Sklavenmoral*] (GM, I:10). But the slaves do not create slave morality any more than cattle create cattle feed.

My reading, putting the emphasis as it does on the cunning of the "priestly people," is in many ways deeply uncomfortable, because Nietzsche identifies this "priestly people" with the Jews (GM, I:7). Yet if we are to understand what Nietzsche thinks, and why he was appropriated or misappropriated in the ways he was, we should not pussyfoot around the utterly incendiary things that he says.[15] And for all his *anti*-anti-Semitism in some places (e.g., BGE, 251), he says unequivocally "that namely with the Jews *the slave revolt in morality* begins" (GM I:7; Cp., BGE, 195).[16] He thinks that they are the ones who launch this key revaluation of

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[14] Wallace (2007) rightly draws attention to this passage, p. 124.

[15] As a rhetorical strategy, Nietzsche relishes showing 19th century Christians, many of whom were deeply anti-Semitic, that their cherished religion is a Jewish invention. See Gemes (2006), p. 200. In pressing this promising line of interpretation as well, Leiter (2002) goes too far, however, in claiming that "'Judea' then, and even 'Jew' are interchangeable for Nietzsche with Catholic, Protestant, and Christianity," p. 196. For the Jews, according to Nietzsche's story, played a particular historical role in the foundation of Christianity, and in neglecting this, one misunderstands a central aspect of the slave revolt. Although Leiter is right that Nietzsche sees a strong affinity between Jews and Christians, and especially that Nietzsche wants to drive home the point that many Christian heroes are in fact Jews, Leiter errs in his reading of GM, I:16. He cites (p. 196) Nietzsche's remark, "...consider to whom one bow downs in Rome itself, today, as though to the embodiment of the highest values – and not just in Rome, but over nearly half the earth." Leiter goes on to suggest that it is "the *Catholic Pope.*" But Nietzsche is explicit in the passage about whom one bows down to in Rome, and it is not the Pope. It is: "*three Jews*, as is known, and *one Jewess* (Jesus of Nazareth, the fisherman Peter, the rug weaver Paul, and the mother of the aforementioned Jesus, named Mary)" (GM, I:16).

[16] Kaufmann eliminates the "namely" and changes "begins" (which suggests a certain causal efficacy) to the more passive "there begins." The German reads: "*dass nämlich mit den Juden* der Sklavenaufstand in der Moral *beginnt*" (GM, I:7)

values, turning the previously exalted into the despised and the previously despised into the exalted:

> It was the Jews who, with awe-inspiring consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) and to hang on to this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying "the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone–and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the accursed, the damned!" (GM, I:7)

Nobles and slaves alike "swallow...[the] bait" (GM, I:8) of this priestly revaluation of values and go along with the revolt. But why do the slaves take up this priestly pap? Why, more mysteriously, do the nobles? This ideology would seem to run directly counter to their interests. And why do the priests bother to launch this revolt in the first place? These will be the guiding questions of the following three subsections. For the time being I am just going to try to fill out the details of the speculative story that is at the heart of the First Essay of the *Genealogy*; I am not (yet) going to try to determine its historical veracity or its claim to philosophical significance.

IIIa. The Slaves

In one of the most penetrating discussions of the *Genealogy* in the Nietzsche literature, R. Jay Wallace helpfully distinguishes between two ways of understanding the role that the slaves play in the revolt that bears their name. On what Wallace calls the "strategic" interpretation, the slaves take up the new values characteristic of slave morality with the instrumental aim of taking revenge on their masters and of valorizing themselves instead. By contrast, on what Wallace calls the "expressive" interpretation, the slaves are drawn to slave morality because of the sorts of values it endorses. But they do not engineer the slave revolt as the outcome of a piece of instrumental reasoning.[17] Wallace sides with the expressive interpretation, and rightly so, I think. The slaves, in the story Nietzsche tells, should not be seen as *strategically inventing* slave morality. It is a priestly invention that proves irresistible to the *ressentiment*-filled slaves.

In this sub-section, I will be building on the Wallace interpretation. I seek to sure up its foundations by looking to textual evidence that can seem to militate against it, and I argue that it in fact does not. In a passage that has lead many interpreters astray, Nietzsche does write that the "slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves only with an imaginary revenge [*sich nur durch eine imaginäre Rache schadlos halten*]" (GM, I:10). Those who are afflicted with *ressentiment* give birth to the values characteristic of slave morality. But whose *ressentiment* is Nietzsche talking about here? The First Essay is filled with descriptions of vengeful, rancorous people, and it is not always clear whether Nietzsche has slaves, priests, or both in mind. But in this passage above, I want to suggest, it is the priests, afflicted with their own festering *ressentiment*, who capitalize on the

[17] Wallace (2007), p. 115 ff.

ressentiment of the slaves and employ this dissatisfaction for their own purposes by foisting slave morality on them.[18]

What is there to be said for this reading? Suppose that we see Nietzsche as talking about the *ressentiment* of the slaves. Beset with *ressentiment*, the slaves invent slave morality so as to strike out against their masters, whom these slaves could not defeat in a direct fight. On this reading, their "revenge" is "imaginary" because it involves the invention of a web of fictitious stories – about the nobles being doomed to hell, the slaves being the blessed and meek children of God who will ascend to heaven – stories that permit the fantasy that the slaves shall make out well and the nobles shall suffer. These imaginary stories have the "compensat[ory]" (GM, I:10) function of consoling the slaves about their place and the nobles' place in the order of things.[19]

It is surely right that the values that come to prominence with the slave revolt have a strong allure for the slaves: on the positive side, these values aggrandize the slaves. The slaves' personal characteristics–being humble, lowborn, weak, and so on–are not the cause for praise in

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[18] The word *ressentiment*, which Nietzsche introduces in GM I:10, functions in his work as a quasi-technical term. But his discussion of it is less than ideally clear. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss it in great detail. The most important thing to note is that it afflicts all three groups (nobles, priests, and slaves), albeit in different ways and in different degrees. All forms of *ressentiment* would seem to involve: (a) dissatisfaction with how the world around one is; (b) an inability (either temporary or systematic) to remedy this; (c) frustration over this inability; (d) a hatred of those who one perceives to be responsible (causally, if not morally) for this dissatisfaction; and e) a desire to exact revenge on such people (or at least see them get some comeuppance). Some have argued that the priests are the paradigmatic bearers of *ressentiment*. See Reginster (1997), p. 289. But Nietzsche thinks it can also afflict nobles (GM, I:10) and the slavish masses as well (Cf., GM, III:15, where he describes *ressentiment* as something "constantly accumulating" in the herd; Cf. also, GM, I:16, where he describes "the popular instincts of *ressentiment*" as leading to the collapse of the *Ancien Régime*). The social stature, physical capabilities, and psychological character of these different groups (nobles, priests, and slaves) will color the particular form that *ressentiment* takes in them. If the nobles feel *ressentiment*, it is, Nietzsche tells us, short in duration. It "consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction" (GM, I:10), or else it evaporates, because these nobles simply forget the "insults and vile actions done [them]" (GM, I:10). Because in the nobles this *ressentiment* does not build up, it "therefore does not *poison*" (GM, I:10). In the priests, however, *ressentiment* stews because they lack the power to exert their hostility in an immediate and satisfying way (or else they lack the thick-skinned nonchalance to ignore the ways in which they have been slighted). Because the priests also have a cunningly creative streak, unlike the docile and passive slaves, these priests channel their *ressentiment* into the revaluation of values (GM, I:7; GM, I:10). It is a difficult question whether the priests capitalize on the pre-existing *ressentiment* of the slaves or whether they turn the dissatisfaction of the slaves into the quasi-moralized emotion of *ressentiment*. In both cases, *ressentiment* is characteristic of the slaves, but the issue is whether it is there before the priestly intervention or not.

[19] This is the reading proposed by Bittner (1994) and accepted by many others.

the noble-dominated culture they live in. This new value system, by contrast, promises them what Wallace has aptly described as a "vindicatory" self-conception, a way of thinking of their (according to Nietzsche) ineluctable condition as something freely chosen and worthy of praise (GM, I:13).[20] Slave morality praises the life characterized by slavish virtues, the life in which one is "patient, humble, and just" (GM, I:13), as the right sort of life for a person to live.[21] Life as a slave is physically dangerous too.[22] The new slave value system seeks to neuter the nobles, who treat the slaves with utter disregard (GM, I:13). It also symbolically strips the nobles of their nobility. Slave morality makes the noble virtues–"powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with that which serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity" (GM, I:7)–a cause not for celebration but for censure. Slave morality promises that the nobles, unless they abandon their way of life (which it takes them to be able freely to do [GM, I:13]) and take up the slavish mode of life instead, will pay for their "sins" by suffering torment in hell (GM, I:15).

Yet, to return to our assumption, if we see the slaves as having created morality with *the strategic aim* of having this "imaginary revenge," and effecting this imaginary self-aggrandizement, we will be left with a serious puzzle. As Rüdiger Bittner has noted, it is mysterious why the slaves would be compensated by a phony story that *they themselves* have created.[23] There is of course the phenomenon of throwing darts at a picture of someone you loathe, all the while knowing that it does him no real harm. This can offer some fleeting

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[20] Wallace (2007), p. 132-4.

[21] "When stepped on, a worm doubles up. That is clever. In that way he lessens the probability of being stepped on again. In the language of morality: *humility"* (TI, "Maxims," 31).

[22] Nietzsche suggests as much in GM, I:13.

[23] Bittner (1994).

satisfaction. But it is not deeply gratifying in the way that Nietzsche thinks the slave revolt is for the slaves. Likewise, what is one to say about the "positive" side of slave morality, the way in which this morality aggrandizes the slaves and affords them a sense of profound self-worth? One can daydream about merits one does not have. But how could a self-valorizing value system that the slaves have themselves concocted come to play a central, organizing role in their lives and afford them any comfort about their value as human beings?[24] All of this would seem to be tremendously psychologically unstable.

Notice, however, that if we accept the reading I am suggesting, and see the priests as the ones who create these new values, things make more sense. When Nietzsche thus writes, in the passage quoted above, that the "slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves only with an imaginary revenge" (GM, I: 10), he is, I suggest, talking about *the priests* as the bearers of this *ressentiment* and the creators of these values. These priests fabricate a story which outlines what *from their perspective* is an "imaginary" form of "revenge," spun, as it is, out of whole cloth. But their dupes, the slaves, are ignorant of this. The slaves find this "imaginary" revenge deeply appealing precisely because they believe it to be *real* revenge; they believe that their masters *actually will* burn in hell. Similarly, the slaves do not believe all of this talk of their infinite worth as children of God is simply made up; they believe it to be *the genuine truth*. That is precisely why they are so comforted by it.[25] Stories about Santa Claus are imaginary, but not from the perspective of the small children kept in line or in eager anticipation by these myths.

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[24] Wallace (2007), p. 114.

[25] Wallace (2007), p. 114.

Nietzsche's description of the slaves' psychology bears out this interpretation I am proposing. In one of the most famous passages in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes:

> When the oppressed, downtrodden, outraged exhort one another with the vengeful cunning of impotence [*List der Ohnmacht*]: "let us be different from the evil, namely good! And he is good who does not outrage, who harms nobody, who does not attack, who does not requite, who leaves revenge to God, who keeps himself hidden as we do, who avoids evil and desires little from life, like us, the patient, humble, and just"–this, listened to calmly and without previous bias, really amounts to no more than: "we weak ones are, after all, weak; it would be good if we did nothing *for which we are not strong enough*"; but this dry matter of fact, this prudence [*Klugheit*] of the lowest order which even insects possess (posing as dead, when in great danger, so as not to do "too much"), has, thanks to the counterfeit and self-deception [*Selbstverlogenheit*] of impotence, clad itself in the ostentatious garb of the virtue of quiet, calm resignation, just as if the weakness of the weak–that is to say, their *essence*, their effects, their sole ineluctable, irremovable reality–were a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a *deed,* a *meritorious* act" (GM, I:13).

Nietzsche uses direct quotation here to give us insight into the how the slaves are thinking about things. But notice the utter lack of cunning in their *self-conception*. They are not saying that they will duplicitously foist these values on the nobles; they are simply mouthing these values to each other. Now, it could be thought that they are mouthing them for the nobles, so as to deceive

them. But this is not actually what appears to be happening: Nietzsche is careful to tell us in this passage that the "weak, oppressed, and outraged" are exhorting "*one another*" (emphasis mine). If they were strategic co-conspirators, this would have little point. He does of course describe them as under the sway of self-deception [*Selbstverlogenheit*]. But does this mean that they invent these beliefs and find them satisfying, because they intentionally and knowingly push out of their minds the fact that they have themselves manufactured these false beliefs? In order to see the slaves as the conscious architects of the slave revolt, Nietzsche would need to attribute to the slaves the strongest and least psychologically-tenable form of self-deception, where one sets out with the aim of deceiving oneself and invents the very beliefs one then comes to believe with the instrumental aim of having the satisfaction of holding those beliefs. Many may doubt whether this strong form of self-deception is even possible. But even supposing that it is, does Nietzsche really think that this dire and unstable psychological mechanism really underwrites the *entire* slave revolt?

There is a more plausible and common kind of self-deception that likely *is* a feature of the slaves' psychology. It happens when one has strong evidence for p, or one believes p, but really wants to believe not-p, so that one will jump at any opportunity to accept not-p when presented with the weakest evidence for it. For example, Husband comes home late almost every night, and all of the other evidence points to his having an affair: the mysterious credit card charges, the lipstick on his cheek, the fact that he does not have the sort of job where he needs to work late, and so on. But Wife is willing to accept his flimsy story that he is "working late" because of her strong desire to believe that he is not having an affair. Now it would surely be right to describe Wife as "self-deceived" here. But she is not *setting out to deceive herself*. She is

latching on to a story that is psychologically-appealing (because a comforting) explanation of her husband's behavior. As Nietzsche puts it with acid wit in *The Antichrist*: "'Faith' means not *wanting* to know what is true" (52). This milder sort of self-deception is far more common and far more psychologically tenable. And it is the sort, I suspect, that we see on the part of the slaves.

When Nietzsche here thus describes the slaves as being driven by the "cunning of impotence" [*List der Ohnmacht*], he is making a *third personal* observation about what they are doing; it is not how they see themselves. The terminology is itself significant, almost surely a wordplay on the famous Hegelian idea of the "cunning of reason" [*List der Vernunft*]. According to Hegel, the onward march of reason in history–the progress of *Geist*–operates through agents without their being aware of their role in this historical process. For Nietzsche the slaves are the unwitting instruments of priestly power. Far from being leaders, the slaves are followers. The slaves' "prudence," remember, is of the "lowest order," the sort had even by "insects" (GM, I:13). Slave morality is expressive of certain values that the slaves find attractive, and these slavish lemmings latch on to slave morality because it permits them (imaginary) revenge against the nobles and an (imaginary) ego boost at the same time.[26] But the slaves do not realize that what they are getting is *just* imaginary; they think they are getting the real thing.

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[26] From the fact that the slaves find these values attractive, we should not thereby conclude that these values are in their interests. The slaves accept a value system that, while tantalizing and superficially beneficial, is actually at odds with what is in their genuine interests. As in so many desperate riots, the mob ends up pillaging its own town at the behest of rabble-rousing demagogues who prey on the mob's festering emotions of frustration and powerlessness. The spoils that the slaves gain–in this case, a life of comfortable safety and a series of vanity-flattering illusions about why they matter in the cosmic order of things–can lead one to think that Nietzsche regards these slaves as the genuine winners in the struggle with the nobles. Yet although in one sense the slaves are triumphant, their victory is Pyrrhic and their spoils meretricious–at least on Nietzsche's highly tendentious way of looking at things. I take up in Chapter 7 the question of what is actually in the best interests of the slaves.

IIIb. The Nobles

It is more apparent why these "revalued" values would be appealing to the slaves. But why would they be appealing to the nobles? This is one of the most difficult questions in the interpretation of the First Essay and one that has long dogged scholars of Nietzsche.[27] Why should these nobles, who enjoy physical, political, and material advantages over the priests and the slaves, be taken in by this new value system that seems not to be in their interest at all? It ignores, denigrates, even vilifies the traits that they have, and it celebrates the traits that the base have–the traits that the nobles are prone to look down upon with contempt. Here we must enter the realm of reconstructive speculation, since Nietzsche is not himself very explicit about any of this. (Once again, what we are speculating about at this point is what is true of the nobles who are the characters in Nietzsche's story, not (yet) what is true as historical fact.)

One natural thought is that we should look later in the *Genealogy* for an answer, in particular to the discussion of "bad conscience" in the Second Essay and to the discussion of "ascetic ideals" in the Third. Humans, on Nietzsche's view, cannot bear suffering that is without a meaning (GM, III:28), and likewise they cannot bear the condition of having nothing to strive for (GM, III:28; Cp. GM, II:7). The new value system offers such a meaning and such a goal. And this, it might be thought, is why the nobles take it up. The reading would thus go something like this: The new value system is appealing because it offers an interpretation of one's internal suffering–this internal suffering is what Nietzsche calls the "bad conscience"–by taking

[27] Mark Migotti (2006) offers an interesting alternative suggestion from the one I develop here. Drawing on *Twilight of the Idols* in particular, Migotti focuses on Socratic dialectic to explain how the nobles might come to give up their noble value system. They get drawn into dialectical combat with Socrates, but find themselves unable to give a rational justification for their way of life. Socrates convinces them that this inability is a serious failing (p. 115-7). Although I agree with Migotti that there are early glimmers of the slave revolt with Socrates, Nietzsche sees the slave revolt, as described in GM I, as more intimately bound up with Christianity in particular. My own sense is that it is less by dialectic–and more by Christian conversion experience–that the slave revolt manages to topple noble values. The "bait," as Nietzsche tells us, is Christ the Redeemer on the cross (GM, I:8).

it to be suffering that one deserves as a guilty sinner. The new value system is also appealing because it offers something to strive for, even if the goal is the dismal one of asceticism for its own sake.

Yet such a line of interpretation cannot explain why the nobles would opt for these meanings and goals against the backdrop of the ones they already had. To begin with, "bad conscience," according to Nietzsche, is a feature of human life since the foundation of human societies. It is "the serious illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced–that change which occurred when he finally found himself enclosed within the walls of society and peace" (GM, II:16). When humans first begin living in close proximity to each other, they had to internalize much of the aggression that they had previously expressed outward. This internalized aggression, resulting in a sort of inward suffering, is what Nietzsche refers to as the "'bad conscience'" (GM, II:16)

Yet more developed noble cultures, as Nietzsche makes clear in his early essay, "Homer's Contest," had a way of channeling these pent-up instincts of aggression into various agonistic pursuits, in which this animal violence gets sublimated, to greater or lesser degrees, in individually or socially worthwhile activities. Nietzsche's discussion of the noble system of values in the *Genealogy* echoes this recurring idea of his. The characteristic activities of the nobles – "war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity" are examples of just this sort of productive sublimation (GM, I:7).[28] By contrast, Christian morality, as Nietzsche maintains in the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*,

[28] As I say, "sublimated to greater or lesser degrees." In many cases, the activity still remains quite violent, as in the case of war (GM, I:7) or pillaging (GM, I:11), but, even in such cases, the aggression is not indiscriminate, but gets channeled at *outsiders*. The nobles show "consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship" toward their fellows (GM, I: 11).

instead of channeling pent-up aggression into these sorts of healthy activities, turns them against the self, along with an elaborate and convoluted story about why the self is deserving of the punishment it itself metes out (specifically, because one is a guilty sinner who *deserves* to suffer [GM, II:22]). Now if the nobles had *no* way of dealing with "bad conscience" at all, then it would make more sense why they would have opted for the new Christian story on these grounds. But they *did* have a way of dealing with "bad conscience," and their strategy seems to have been quite successful. Christianity, in this respect, does not seem to be any improvement. It seems much worse in fact.

So too with the ascetic ideal: Why would the nobles, with so many other ideals to strive for – honor, glory, wealth, beauty – take up this desperate stopgap measure, when their lives are already guided by the pursuit of these other ideals? As Nietzsche stresses, the ascetic ideal is truly a last ditch effort. It is because humans are so desperate to strive for something–for anything at all–that they would even, at the extreme, opt to strive for asceticism for its own sake. "Man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will." (GM, III: 28). If the nobles had *no* values to strive for, then it would make sense that they might be willing to accept the goal, however pathetic, that the ascetic ideal offers. But they *do* have ideals to strive for. Why then would they have turned from these ideals to the ascetic ideal? It makes little sense.

So, if not the ascetic ideal and the allure of an interpretation of the bad conscience, what is it then that initially attracts the nobles to slave morality? The key point, I think, is this: It is not that the slavish moral value system *independently* appeals to them; indeed, it is utterly mysterious why it would. Rather, this moral value system comes as part of the glittering package of Christian benefits, and it is these that the nobles find alluring. Now, this is only somewhat less

puzzling, since it can be difficult to see why the nobles should care about the goods offered by Christianity.

The first thing to note is that they, like the slaves, are deluded. They take Christianity's lies for the truth, and thus they do not realize that "Christianity," though it "promises everything...*fulfills nothing*" (A, 42). But the issue of gullibility aside, even still, why is Christianity at all appealing to the nobles? It mounts an insidious campaign. Christianity casts doubt on the sort of worldly goods (status, wealth, beauty, bodily strength) that the nobles take to be central to the flourishing life. It stresses, in particular, the uncertain status of these sorts of goods: A Roman citizen may think he has a good life if he is socially prominent, rich, handsome, and strong. But these features can be lost. Through aging, beauty fades, and muscles atrophy. Wealth and status are subject to the vagaries of chance. Jesus thus intones: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20). Focusing on worldly goods is exactly what one should *not* be doing. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matthew 6:25). What slave morality most ruthlessly exploits is a human desire–to which the nobles are by no means immune–for surety and stability. It is, I think, this desire that lays the groundwork for a change in view, whereby the truly good life–eternal life in heaven–is one that is immune to fortune and is much better than the worldly goods on earth.

The nobles never had doubted that they mattered. Simply enjoying honor and esteem in their communities or from their divinities was enough. But by emphasizing the transitory nature of this-worldly goods, Christianity throws this all into serious doubt and thus makes the nobles

doubt whether they really are as important as they think they are. "However important you may be in Rome, *you are a speck of dust*." Yet even while sowing this doubt, Christianity swoops in to console the nobles for the doubt it fosters by telling them that in fact they *do* matter because they are made in the image of God. God loves them, but not for their nobility, beauty, and strength, but simply because they are children of God and accordingly of infinite worth. Although the slavish values *seem* to denigrate the traits from which the nobles draw their self-esteem, it does so in a complex way by throwing the value of their other traits into doubt, while at the same time finding a trait that it convinces them is worth more. This "miserable flattery of personal vanity" (A, 43) is one that is appealing not just to slaves but to nobles as well.

Why did the wealthy St. Francis of Assissi give all he owned to the poor and enter the service of God? Why did these apparently noble people prostrate themselves at the foot of the cross, to use a charge Nietzsche later uses to attack Wagner (NCW)? They did so because they thought that the goods of Christianity were more lasting and secure.

IIIc. The Priests

Now that we've seen why the new morality is supposed to be appealing to slaves and nobles alike, why do the priests, according to Nietzsche, bother to create it? Compare their position with that of the slaves. The slaves, as we saw, are envious and frustrated. Their condition is one of political subjugation and impotence. Because of their lack of strength, they are unable to vent their festering hostility in an effective way on the nobles. In this respect, the priests are similar to the slaves. But the priests are also importantly different, according to Nietzsche, in

two main ways. First, they are different in the extraordinary extent to which they crave power. Now, of course, Nietzsche thinks that all humans, on some basic level, long for power (GM, III: 7). But in the priests this hunger is exacerbated, since they cannot attain the socio-political supremacy they want. It results in a sort of short-man complex writ large. "It is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions, to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred. The truly great haters in world history have always been priests" (GM, I:7). But, because of the second key respect in which they are different from the slaves– their creativity and cleverness–the priests can do battle with the nobles in a more underground, more "spiritual" way by revaluing their values:

> All that has been done on earth against "the noble," "the powerful," "the masters," "the rulers," fades into nothing compared with what the *Jews* have done against them; the Jews, that priestly people, who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say, an act of the *most spiritual revenge*. For this alone was appropriate to a priestly people, the people embodying the most deeply repressed priestly vengefulness (GM, I:7).

The key to this priestly maneuver is not just the revaluation of these values *per se*, but in getting slaves and nobles alike to accept these new values. In this cunningly vindictive enterprise, the slaves are the priests' pawns, and the nobles are their dupes.

> Did Israel not attain the ultimate goal of its sublime vengefulness precisely through the bypath of this "Redeemer [Jesus Christ]," this ostensible opponent and disintegrator of Israel? Was it not part of the secret black art of [a] truly *grand* politics of revenge, of a farseeing, subterranean, slowly advancing, and premeditated revenge, that Israel must deny itself the real instrument of its revenge before all the world as a mortal enemy and nail it to the cross, so that "all the world," namely all the opponents of Israel, could unhesitatingly swallow just this bait? And could spiritual subtlety imagine any *more dangerous* bait than this? Anything to equal the enticing, intoxicating, overwhelming, and undermining power of that symbol of the "holy cross," that ghastly paradox of a "God on the cross," that mystery of an unimaginable ultimate cruelty and self-crucifixion of God *for the salvation of man?* What is certain, at least, is that *sub hoc signo* Israel, with its vengefulness and revaluation of all values, has hitherto triumphed again and again over all other ideals, over all *nobler* ideals (GM, I:8)

Now it might seem that what the priests are doing is creating values that aggrandize their weakness, so that the benefit comes in the consolation of thinking their personal characteristics are valuable. And similarly, it might seem that when they inflict "imaginary revenge" on the nobles by devaluing noble character traits and fantasizing about the punishments that the nobles supposedly will suffer in hell, the benefit comes in this consoling *Schadenfreude* that they indulge in. But this way of looking at things understates what the priests have really accomplished. In creating this new value system, they have inflicted *real revenge* on the nobles by way of this "imaginary revenge." In getting nobles and slaves alike ("'all the world'" [GM, I:8]) to

accept this new value system that they have invented, the priests increase their power by shaping world history in a decisive way. It is in this way that they triumph over the nobles. Although the priests seem to be lacking in power compared to the nobles, they are able, through their wily stealth, to usurp them.

The most natural reading of the *Genealogy* is one that views the priests as the instigators and inventors of morality and the nobles and the slaves as their gulls. Three questions should be kept separate: First, is this the right account of the narrative as Nietzsche tells it? Second, what are Nietzsche's own aspirations for this narrative? Is it meant to be literal history or something else? And third, is it in any way a plausible account of how morality developed? So far, I've just tried to work out the details of the genealogical story itself. In the section to come, I will consider the second two questions.

IV. The Point of a Genealogy

What are we to make of Nietzsche's story? If we think of it in very literal terms, it can seem preposterously fantastical. Can it really be that morality was invented in the sort of priestly conspiracy that Nietzsche suggests? How are these character types from the *Genealogy* supposed to map onto historical reality? Does everyone fall into one group or another (noble, priest, slave)? Does everyone have the characteristic motives of his particular group? Indeed, does *anyone* have the motives attributed to the group (especially the motives attributed to the priests)? Even if such incredible historical claims were true, what evidence could Nietzsche possibly have to assert this? These questions are all the more perplexing and potentially

embarrassing to the friend of Nietzsche, since he would appear to have pretensions to historical accuracy for his genealogical account (GM, "Preface," 7).

The reader of Nietzsche might wish to adopt ways of deflating Nietzsche's claims to serious historicity. Nietzsche *tells* us he is looking "in the direction of an actual *history of morality*" (GM, "Preface," 7). But really he is presenting this tale as a shocking bit of rhetoric so as to draw on the affects of his audience, eliciting their sympathy and disgust as part of his revaluation of values.[29] Or, though he adopts the mantle of the historian, he is trying to give us psychological insight into what different sorts of people in general are like.[30] Or, similarly, he is trying to convince us that we fail to understand our own psychology and motivations.[31] Although Nietzsche is trying to do many things at once in the *Genealogy*, including the three things just mentioned, he also, I believe, really takes himself to be getting at the actual history of morality.[32]

Unlike the "English," who Nietzsche sees as having seriously misunderstood the origins of morality, Nietzsche takes himself to be giving an account of morality's genesis that is closer to the truth. The historical conjectures given by the "English psychologists" (GM, I:1)[33] Nietzsche describes as follows:

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[29] Janaway (2007), Ch. 6.

[30] May (1999), p. 51-2.

[31] Gemes (2006), p. 204-6

[32] In this, I agree with Nehamas (1985), p. 245-6n1; Geuss (1999b), p. 17; and Leiter (2002), p. 166.

[33] Nietzsche uses the term "English" quite loosely. He has in mind, among others, his erstwhile friend Paul Rée, the author of *The Origin of the Moral Sensations.* (GM, "Preface," 4). Rée was not English.

> "Originally – so they decree – "one approved unegoistic actions and called them good from the point of view of those to whom they were done, that is to say, those to whom they were *useful*; later one *forgot* how this approval originated and, simply because unegoistic actions were always *habitually* praised as good, one also felt them to be good– as if they were something good in themselves." (GM, I:2)

Nietzsche raises two objections to this historical hypothesis. First, he claims that it does not account for the way in which the concept of "good" was used in the ancient world. "[T]he judgment 'good' did *not* originate with those to whom 'goodness' was shown! Rather it was 'the good' themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebian" (GM, I:2). Nietzsche goes on to buttress this claim with etymological evidence. It is a late development–he implies but does not directly state–that the concept "good" applies *primarily* to actions; it previously applied in the first instance to types of people, and by extension, to the characteristic actions that they perform. Far from being a characteristic which anyone acting rightly could possess, "goodness" was instead bound up with one's social station and with one's physical characteristics (GM, I:4). The "good" actions, moreover, were not by any means the "unegoistic" actions (GM, I:2). It is only "when aristocratic value judgments *declined* that the whole antithesis 'egoistic' 'unegoistic' obtruded itself more and more on human conscience..." (GM, I:2).

His second objection is that this "English" historical hypothesis suffers from "an inherent psychological absurdity" (GM, I:3):

> The utility of the unegoistic action is supposed to be the source of the approval accorded it, and this source is supposed to have been *forgotten* – but how is this forgetting *possible*? Has the utility of such actions come to an end at some time or other? The opposite is the case: this utility has rather been an everyday experience at all times, therefore something that has been underlined again and again: consequently, instead of fading from consciousness, instead of becoming easily forgotten, it must have been impressed on the consciousness more and more clearly (GM, I:3).

These criticisms, as Nietzsche himself points out, are not intended as knock-down objections (GM, "Preface," 4). They are designed to raise reasonable doubt about the questionable English account of morality's origins and to prepare the way for Nietzsche's own alternative account. Nietzsche is open to the prospect that someone could come along with a better naturalistic story about why moral outlooks have undergone the transformation they have. He has not tried to *refute* other historical accounts (those of the "English" biologists for example). "[W]hat have I to do with refutations!" he says. "...[A]s becomes a positive spirit," Nietzsche says that he has merely endeavored "to replace the improbable with the more probable, possibly one error with another" (GM, "Preface," 4).

Whereas the English "gaz[e] around haphazardly in the blue," Nietzsche announces–perhaps ironically given his vituperative rhetoric and thin evidence–that he is sticking to the cold facts in arriving at his account. "For it must be obvious which color is a hundred times more vital for a genealogist of morals than blue [that being where "the English" gaze]: namely

gray, that is, what is documented, what can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short the entire long hieroglyphic record, so hard to decipher, of the moral past of mankind!" (GM, "Preface," 7). Although Nietzsche does cite some such evidence– about linguistic transformations (GM, I:5-6) and about primary religious sources to capture the attitudes characteristic of early Christianity (GM, I:15), his "gray...documented" (GM, "Preface," 7) support is quite scant when compared with the vastly ambitious hypotheses he draws. So what can be said in defense of the historicity of Nietzsche's account?

He tells us that he is looking "in the direction of an actual *history of morality*" (GM, "Preface," 7). Indeed, "*Zur*" in title of the work itself– *Zur Genealogie der Moral*–could just as well be translated "toward" instead of "on," further emphasizing this tentative provisional character of the account on offer. Looking *"toward"* or *"in the direction"* (GM, "Preface," 7; emphasis mine) of the history of morality can be understood in at least two ways: One could think of it as a first start at the project of rigorous scholarly history, up to the standards of what one would do working in a History Department. Or alternatively, as I think is more charitable to the strengths of what Nietzsche is doing, one can interpret the phrase "in the direction" as granting one license to paint with a broader brush. Given Nietzsche's extensive discussion of various approaches to historical investigation in UM II, it would be hasty to assume that he thinks of the sort of nitty-gritty scholarship engaged in by professional historians as the only appropriate way to get at truths about history. A less hard-nosed, more speculative approach might well claim to shed distinctive light on history also.

Although Nietzsche's genealogical account, in spirit, is far from the valorizing tone of "monumental history," as he defines that in UM II, it does have important methodological

affinities with that approach. Such history, according to Nietzsche, "will have no use for that absolute veracity: it will always have to deal in approximations and generalities, in making what is dissimilar look similar; it will always have to diminish the differences of motives and instigations so as to exhibit the *effectus* monumentally, that is to say as something exemplary and worthy of imitation, at the expense of the *causae*..." (UM, II:2).

Nietzsche does not of course think of the slave revolt as "exemplary and worthy of imitation" (UM, II:2). But the idea that exhibiting the "*effectus*" comes at the expense of getting to the precise "*causae*" would seem to capture well what Nietzsche is up to in the *Genealogy*. He wants, in the first instance, to draw our attention to a certain historical *result*. As part of a protracted cultural shift lasting for hundreds of years, roughly between the birth of Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire (GM, 1:16), a certain "noble" value system, characteristic of the Roman Empire, and earlier of pre-Socratic Greece, comes gradually to be displaced by Judeo-Christian slave morality. One century Christians were being fed to the lions as entertainment for Roman audiences; several centuries later Christians were at the helm in Rome and their values were widespread across Europe. Nietzsche's project, first and foremost, is to make his audience aware of the mere fact that this monumental cultural change occurred. The sort of morality we live by today has not always been the default convention. This is itself a remarkable (and a true) observation about the history of the West.

Nietzsche also wants to suggest *why* this change has occurred. And this is where we run into serious trouble in trying to work out how literally the tale spun in the *Genealogy* is supposed to be taken. His strategy is to characterize the social and psychological conditions that prompted this change and that allowed it to succeed. He does so, as we have seen, by speculating

about the attitudes, needs, and motivations of three basic social groups–the nobles, the slaves, and "the priestly people."

One way of understanding this talk of group attitudes, needs, and motives would be to see it as reducible to claims about the psychologies of the individual members of the group. This approach in sociology and social philosophy is usually referred to as *methodological individualism*. It seems to me, however, that Nietzsche is most plausibly read in a more collectivist spirit. What Nietzsche is trying to explain is not primarily what is happening at the level of the psychology of the individual person, who is deciding whether to accept morality and what benefits it will bring. Nor is it even to be understood as something happening at the social level, if that is construed as the mere aggregation of atomistic individual perspectives and reducible to them. It is rather best understood as an explanation of what is happening at the social level, construed in a more collectivist way in terms of *the interests of particular groups.* Nietzsche, I suggest, uses his vivid story to dramatize, in a non-literal way, the needs and interests of these different groups. In speaking of the group interests, however, he is not meaning to imply, as would be very implausible, that these are the conscious (or even, I think, unconscious) motives held by the majority of individual agents in the group. In this respect, such a form of historical explanation, like "monumental history" traffics in "approximations and generalities" and perhaps "diminish[es] the differences of motives and instigations" (UM, II:2). But it should not be taken too individualistically. Treated in a more sensible, collectivist way, it can draw our attention to important historical truths about how large scale social forces are at work.

Hegel, Marx, and others (such as Durkheim and Comte) are often put in this camp of *methodological collectivists*.[34] When Marx describes certain social arrangements persisting because they are in the interest of the capitalist class, his explanation does not go by way of holding that all or most individual capitalist plutocrats undertake some sort of instrumental reasoning to the effect that if they do x, good consequences for them will result. Of course, sometimes the thought-process may be this crass. But the functional explanation in terms of group interests is not presupposing that it needs to be. Whether Marx is right or not, one should concede that what he says is at least more plausible as a claim at the social-holistic rather than the individual-aggregative level, where one abstracts away from the motives of particular agents and looks instead to the interests of whole groups.

Now, with this comparison to Marx in mind, let us look back at the story that Nietzsche has presented: *Within the story*, the priests are made out to be the calculating ones. But we should not conclude from this that at the individual level, many or indeed *any* priests were literally conspiring in this way. The reason Nietzsche stresses their conspiratorial nature is to make vivid how the priests, *considered as a group,* end up effecting a monumental cultural change. (If Marx were a less sober, less scientific writer, he might have made a similar point, by portraying capitalists as a cabal of cigar-smoking fat cats.) Thus, when we go outside the confines of the story, Nietzsche's idea is not that the slave revolt is brought about though a conscious conspiracy on the part of actual historical priests, any more than the capitalist system is

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[34] See Elster (1985): "Methodological collectivism...assumes that there are supra-individual entities that are prior to individuals in the explanatory order...This frequently takes the form of functional explanation, if one argues that objective benefits provide a sufficient explanation for the actions that, collectively, generate them," p. 6. Methodological individualism, by contrast, is "the doctrine that all social phenomena–their structure and change–are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals–their properties, their goals, their beliefs, and their actions. Methodological individualism thus conceived is a form of reductionism," p. 5. Elster is in sympathy with individualism, and he seeks to extract what is beneficial in Marxist thinking aside from these (in his view) dubious collectivist methodological commitments.

sustained in this way. It is social pressures, particularly the threat of assimilation into the Roman Empire, that drive the priests (as a group) to invent Judeo-Christian morality.

The comparison with Marx and Hegel, the standard bearers of methodological collectivism, is instructive in another way. Hegel thinks that one moral outlook comes to replace another, thanks to the progress of reason in history. (Individual agents play a role in this, but they are not typically conscious of their role in this cosmic drama.) Marx shares the collectivist sentiment, but thinks that reason is not the engine. He thinks instead that economic relations are the motive force behind this change. More in the vein of Marx than in that of Hegel, Nietzsche sees changes in moral outlook as spurred by *material conditions*, particularly arational social pressures. The precise details of Nietzsche's "just-so" story are not very plausible when taken to characterize the psychology of the individual actors in the slave revolt. But as a holistic, organic characterization of the interests and motives of the group, it is considerably more plausible.

IV. Conclusion

Nietzsche is not so invested in whether his own genetic hypothesis is right. His "real concern," he says, "was something much more important than hypothesis-mongering, whether my own or other people's, on the origin of morality (or more precisely: the latter concerned me solely for the sake of a goal to which it was only one means among many." Nietzsche is primarily interested instead in the question of the "*value* of morality" (GM, "Preface," 5). He of course wants to know "under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil?" (GM, "Preface," 3). But more importantly, he wants to ask: "*[w]hat value do they*

themselves possess? Have they hitherto hindered or helped human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plentitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?" (GM, "Preface," 3). In the chapter that follows, Chapter 5, I will ask on what grounds Nietzsche is criticizing morality.

Chapter 5:
Nietzsche's Critique of Morality

"Let us articulate this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values,
the value of these values themselves must first be called into question…
-Nietzsche, GM: "Preface," 6

I. Introduction

It is a truism–albeit one requiring two sets of scare quotes–that Nietzsche, the self-styled "immoralist," (Cf., EH, "Destiny," 4) is a critic of "morality." As we saw in the previous chapter, by "morality" Nietzsche has in mind not all of ethics, but a particular family of normative views. What, I ask in this chapter, does Nietzsche have against this morality? I will begin by rejecting two common interpretations. The first is that Nietzsche thinks morality has become defunct with the "death of God." The second, all the more tempting given Nietzsche's concern with how morality arose, is that Nietzsche renders a verdict on morality from (alleged) facts about its origins. I go on to propose a third, more promising interpretation, according to which Nietzsche takes morality to task for its bad effects in hampering the flourishing of great individuals and cultures. While this interpretation is on much firmer textual ground than the previous two, there are good reasons to resist this reading as the best, and certainly as the exclusive, account of the basis of Nietzsche's criticism of morality. I go on to propose an alternative construal that is more theoretical than practical in spirit. This construal sees Nietzsche's objection to morality as rooted not simply or even primarily in its bad effects, but in what, for lack of a better word, might be described as the *character* of these moral values themselves, a notion I will be clarifying in due course. In taking the lynchpin of Nietzsche's criticism to be something *other* than morality's effects, the reading I propose better represents Nietzsche's complex attitude toward

the wide range of effects–both negative *and positive*–that he sees morality as engendering. It also makes better sense of Nietzsche's apparent doubts that the truly great could ever be stymied by the strictures of morality. And moreover it allows for the idea that morality, as a normative institution, is deeply objectionable, in such a way that its objectionable character outstrips its objectionable effects.

II. Morality and the "Death of God"

The first interpretation that I shall consider is common in the reception of Nietzsche, especially in anglophone moral philosophy, and it is one which even some Nietzsche scholars continue to perpetuate.[1] It is the thought that the "death of God" plays a central role in Nietzsche's critique of morality (in the sense of morality outlined above). As Terence Irwin, for example, puts it, echoing the line from *The Brothers Karamazov*: "...[Nietzsche] believes that if God is dead, everything is permitted."[2] Should Nietzsche be attributed a view of this sort? This may sound like something Nietzsche could say. But, importantly, he never *does* say it–and with good reason. Given that Nietzsche does not think everything is permitted (D, 103) and given that he thinks God is dead (GS, 108), clearly he cannot accept this conditional. But let's explore why readers of Nietzsche might nonetheless be drawn to this interpretation.

As Nietzsche understands the "death of God," it is not the literal demise of some metaphysical or supernatural entity; Nietzsche of course thinks there never has been a God in *that* sense, and so the rich image of God *dying*–existing and then not existing–on this construal, would make no sense. By this celebrated phrase of his, Nietzsche instead means to refer to the

[1] For representative examples, see Parfit (2011), Vol. II, p. 582-9; Irwin (2009), Vol. III, p. 353; Detwiler (1990), p. 69.

[2] Irwin (2009), Vol. III, p. 353.

cultural shift in which the *concept* of God gradually ceases to be one around which people in 19th century Europe centrally organize their lives.[3] So what is this argument from the "death of God" thought to be? It is never expressed very precisely. The basic idea is that morality, whether its adherents realize it or not, is anchored in Judeo-Christianity in some important way. Now that "God is dead," morality is objectionable because it lacks the proper foundations.

Yet, putting aside the quick answer I gave above, it is a mistake for another reason to attribute an argument of this sort to Nietzsche.[4] Morality, according to Nietzsche, has been flawed since its inception. Even when God was "alive"–when belief in God was much more widespread among even the intellectual elites, when God was the centerpiece of a "form of life," to use that later phrase of Wittgenstein's–morality was nonetheless, by Nietzsche's lights, normatively objectionable. We don't want to attribute to Nietzsche the deeply un-Nietzschean suggestion that if God were "alive," morality would be just fine.[5]

It is surely right that Nietzsche thinks of the "death of God" as marking a seminal historical event in the 19th century, one whose far-reaching implications have not been fully appreciated (GS, 108). The sociological effects of this event will be tremendous. And perhaps that is all proponents of this view mean to point to when they think of morality as collapsing

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[3] Nietzsche's seminal discussion of the "death of God" is in GS, 108 and GS, 125.

[4]For criticism of this way of reading Nietzsche, see Shaw (2007), p. 83-88.

[5]Sometimes, the view goes even further to attribute to Nietzsche the claim that with the death of God *all value* collapses. This is an even more disastrous misinterpretation. To attribute such a view to Nietzsche is to saddle him with a kind of "theocentrism," according to which there is only value in the world if there is a God. (See Shaw (2007) for incisive discussion of this issue, p. 83-88.) But Nietzsche thinks there is secular, worldly value, even though there never has been a God. Ironically, this perversely theocentrist way of thinking is what Nietzsche *most fears* about the impending threat of what he calls "nihilism." People will think that if there is no God, then nothing matters. Part of the confusion on this score may stem from the fact that Nietzsche uses the term "nihilism" in a way that is very different from its use in contemporary meta-ethics. Nietzsche takes nihilism to involve, among other things, the malaise of *thinking* that there are no values if there is no God. In his usage, however, nihilism is not the meta-axiological claim that *in fact* there are no values. Regardless of his meta-axiological views, Nietzsche cannot think that whether there are any values at all depends on the existence, or the prominence in Western cultural life, of a being that Nietzsche himself regards as a depraved illusion.

(Cf., GS, 343). People will lose faith in morality as they lose faith in God. But that is not Nietzsche's *grounds* for objecting to morality. It is simply an observation about its fate in modern culture.

Now God's death will, or should, be a spur, Nietzsche thinks, to realizing the historical contingency of the morality we have inherited from Judeo-Christianity and therefore coming to recognize its objectionable features to which we may have hitherto been blind. Nietzsche upbraids those who fail to realize this–those who, like George Eliot, blithely and uncritically try to carry on with a basically Christian morality on purely secular grounds (TI, "Skirmishes," 5). Yet it is easy to get confused about just what Nietzsche's charge here is. He writes:

> Christianity is a system, a *whole* view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one's hands. Christianity presupposes that man does not know, *cannot* know, what is good for him, what evil: he believes in God, who alone knows it. Christian morality is a command; its origin is transcendent; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticism; it has truth only if God is the truth–it stands and falls with faith in God (TI, "Skirmishes," 5).

This may seem fodder for tying Nietzsche's criticisms of morality to the "death of God." Notice, however, that the last sentence quoted is not what Nietzsche *himself* thinks, but in the scope of what Christianity presupposes. (After all, Nietzsche clearly does not himself think that Christianity is "beyond all criticism"!) *Christians* surely think that morality depends on God for

its authority. *Christians* think that morality stands and falls with faith in God. But *Nietzsche* doesn't think this. By no means does he think that if there were a God, or if faith in this God were more widespread, morality would be just fine. His point is simply that it is intellectual cowardice not to subject morality to deeper critical scrutiny once one has given up the belief in God, since many of our moral intuitions, whether we realize it or not, are subtly derived from that theological framework. What makes these moral views objectionable or unobjectionable, however, is independent of God's existence or nonexistence. It has to do with morality's *own* normative failings.

III. Morality and Origins

Another suggestion, more common from Nietzsche's detractors than from his defenders, is that Nietzsche thinks morality is problematic because of how it began. Nietzsche's whole approach can suggest this interpretation, because, as we saw in the last chapter, he spends so much time (particularly in the *Genealogy*) sketching a speculative account about the origins of morality. He is in particular concerned to unearth the way morality came about through the machinations of "the priestly people" trying to strike a blow against the pagan ethic of "the nobles" (GM, I). Morality has an ugly past, the argument would go. And *because* of this ugly past, morality is objectionable. I have dealt in the previous chapter with the details of Nietzsche's genealogical narrative and its pretensions to historical accuracy. I won't rehearse my interpretation here, but I do want to address the question of what role this narrative is supposed to play in Nietzsche's attack on morality.

A particularly egregious form of this genetic argument would assume that from this narrative of morality's history, Nietzsche is drawing strong substantive conclusions about what today, as a matter of normative ethics, ought to be done and avoided. Morality, as he understands it, is an historical institution, offering itself as the right account of what is valuable and how one should live. Yet its particular directives (do x, avoid y) may well overlap with those of a good Nietzschean ethics. We should not assume because there is something wrong with morality (the historical institution) that its directives all need to be thrown out as well (D, 103).

Insofar as Nietzsche is using morality's history to sow doubts about what today we should take as valuable, he is making the more modest point that this origin of moral values should simply decrease our confidence about our present judgments since, if Nietzsche is right, their origin was highly suspect.[6] The intuitive judgment of a weak person may be that the right action is the one that protects the weak and helpless from harm, but in thinking this, one may be simply relying on self-interested prejudices, not appropriately responsive to the evaluative considerations that support this belief. The problem is one of the modal failure of my evaluative belief to vary with the truth: Even if this moral belief were *not* true, one would still hold it, given one's investment in one's own safety. Although this does not show the moral belief is false, it perhaps should undermine one's confidence in it–and undermine claims that one might make to know it.[7]

Prevailing scholarly wisdom is that Nietzsche is *not* making any stronger sort of argument from origins than this epistemic point just mentioned, and indeed that he warns

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[6] Kail (2011).

[7] Sinhababu (2007); Kail (2011).

against the genetic fallacy himself.[8] In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche in fact explicitly rejects genetic arguments with ambitious normative conclusions (GS, 345; Cf., GM, II:12). Yet this interpretive consensus has recently been questioned.[9] Nietzsche, this new interpretation notes, *does* yoke together the historical investigation into morality's origins with his critical brief against it. In the "Preface" to the *Genealogy*, the passage I have used as an epigraph, Nietzsche writes that what is needed is "a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves* must first be called into question–and for that," he continues, "is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed..." (5). Paul Loeb, drawing on this passage, has argued that "Nietzsche's notion of genealogy is meant to suggest the history of plebeian ancestry that proves their disvalue [that is, the disvalue of moral values] from an aristocratic standpoint."[10] Loeb points out that on a truly aristocratic way of thinking, things get judged by their birth and not on their merits. The whole idea that people or things should be judged on their merits alone, regardless of their lineage, is emblematic of a kind of anti-aristocratic democratic egalitarianism that Nietzsche holds in contempt.[11]

Loeb's is an interesting suggestion, since Nietzsche's praise for aristocracy and disdain for plebeianism are such deep features of his work. But, first of all, we must remember that morality is not of wholly ignoble origin. It was not invented by the slaves themselves. It is of semi-noble birth, as the invention of the semi-noble priests.[12] The basic problem with the Loeb

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[8] See Nehamas (1985), p. 110; Conway (1994); Hoy (1994); Geuss (1999b); Leiter, (2002), p. 173.

[9] Loeb (2008).

[10] Loeb (2008), p. 3

[11] Loeb (2008), p. 7

[12] Anderson (2011) stresses the nobility of the priests. I wouldn't go quite as far as he does in making the priests out to be simply a subset of the nobles, but he is right to recognize that the priests have various noble features.

interpretation is that morality, judged in terms of the particular values it enshrines, is actually *more* debased than its quasi-noble origins would suggest. Creator and created come apart. These values are the work of the "priestly people" trying to come up with something beneath them that will be to the taste of the slaves (and will also appeal to the slavish element within the nobles' psyches).

From the fact that Nietzsche sees an investigation into the history of morality as a necessary step to criticizing it, it does not follow that its history is supposed to be *the basis* of Nietzsche's criticism. The reason Nietzsche thinks we must look into the history of morality, first and foremost, is that we will not have the very object of our critique in view *until* we look to its history. As Nietzsche puts the point in the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*, "all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable" (GM, II:13). Morality, being an historical phenomenon, is a case in point. The reason one needs "knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which [moral values] grew, under which they evolved and changed" is that this is how one *delineates* morality as an entity in the first place.

IV. The Argument from Consequences

The foregoing two arguments are not positions that should be attributed to Nietzsche as the basis of his critique of morality. I'd now like to turn to another reading that is much more plausible, but ultimately, I think, not satisfactory. This is what I shall call the *Argument from Consequences*. The Argument from Consequences construes Nietzsche's attack as focused on the effects of morality on the realization of the perfectionistic values Nietzsche cares about. On one

prominent interpretation in this vein, offered by Brian Leiter, Nietzsche is taken as holding that morality is problematic because of a "causal mechanism of harm."[13] This reading attributes to Nietzsche an empirical claim about the effects of morality on human excellence and creative achievement. Living in accordance with morality, or more indirectly, living in a culture suffused with the attitudes characteristic of morality, "will have the effect of leading potentially excellent persons to value what is in fact not conducive to their flourishing and to devalue what is, in fact, essential to it."[14]

It is much more credible as an interpretation because Nietzsche certainly thinks that morality does have a great many bad consequences. Yet does Nietzsche think morality is bad simply, or even primarily, because of its bad consequences? *No*, I will be arguing here. In this section, I want to develop the most plausible version of the argument from consequences and then to raise some challenges for it. These are not, by any means, meant to be decisive objections to it. I do, however, want to emphasize that morality's consequences are far more of a mixed bag than the argument from consequences can make it seem. It is far from clear whether things would have been better, from the standpoint of perfectionistic values and the flourishing of culture, had this morality never arisen. It is as much a gift as a curse. Then in the section (V) to follow, I will develop what I think is a more decisive objection to this consequences interpretation, at least insofar as it claims to be the *exhaustive account* of why Nietzsche is critical of morality. As I will argue in this section to come, a great deal of Nietzsche's criticism of morality has nothing to do with the effects of morality; it has instead focused on the objectionable character of the ideals, practices, and symbols of morality itself.

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[13] Leiter (2002), p. 127 ff.

[14] Leiter (2002), p. 133.

In order to assess the Argument from Consequences in more detail, though, let us now consider how morality's consequences might be thought to pose a threat to the flourishing of human excellence and greatness. One way of construing the threat is to see it as a very direct one. On this interpretation, because Nietzschean greatness *consists in* the violation of morality, a person who lives in accordance with morality will be incapable of being great. (This is, if you will, the Leopold and Loeb interpretation of Nietzsche.) Nietzschean great individuals are great *in virtue* of violating the moral law; the murder *makes* them great.[15] Now Nietzsche does sometimes say things that are not wholly uncongenial to this interpretation: "The lawyers defending a criminal," he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "are rarely artists enough to turn the beautiful terribleness of his deed to his advantage" (110). Furthermore, in a chilling passage from *The Gay Science* entitled "*What belongs to greatness*," Nietzsche writes: "Who will attain anything great if he does not find in himself the strength and the will to *inflict* great suffering? Being able to suffer is the least thing; weak women and even slaves often achieve virtuosity in that. But not to perish of internal distress and uncertainty when one inflicts great suffering and hears the cry of this suffering–that is great, that belongs to greatness" (325).[16]

Yet even if we allow that *sometimes* greatness consists in transgressing morality, more often for Nietzsche, greatness consists in channeling one's energies–often the same energies that could be used to violent ends–and putting them in the service of creative pursuits–composing

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[15] Two other possibilities are: (1) Committing the murder (or whatever) is partly constitutive of being great, but one's greatness doesn't wholly consist in its perpetration. (2) Committing the murder (or whatever) serves a merely epistemic role, offering external proof that one was antecedently great.

[16] The claim here may be somewhat milder than it first appears. It may be the view that great people have a certain capacity or disposition – a "strength" and a "will" to inflict suffering– in other words, that they are hardened in a certain way. It does not make the stronger claim that their greatness *consists in* inflicting this suffering. At the end of the passage Nietzsche would seem to be equivocal on whether greatness consists in this callous attitude ("that is great"), or whether this callous attitude is simply characteristic of people who are otherwise great ("that belongs to greatness").

symphonies, writing literary masterpieces, or penning philosophy. Many of the figures he returns to again and again as his shining examples of human greatness are creative and intellectual figures.[17] Composing a string trio, in most cases, is not *itself* directly a violation of morality. Yet how exactly is morality supposed to be in tension with the flourishing of these creative figures? If we construe morality as a danger only in this rather crude way, we will not be able to understand why Nietzsche is concerned about its effects on the class of people he cares most about.

A milder and more plausible version of the Argument from Consequences–compatible of course with the stronger view being true in limited cases–would see violations of morality as often *instrumentally necessary* for greatness, rather than constitutive of it in their own right. When Gauguin, in Bernard Williams's famous Nietzschean example, abandons his family to pursue his artistic career, his greatness does not consist in the abandonment of his family *per se*, but in the artistic career he was able to have as a result of this freedom from domestic responsibility.[18] At the social level, similarly, certain immoral social arrangements are conducive to the flourishing of great individuals and cultures (BGE, 257).

The Argument from Consequences becomes more plausible still when it moves from a focus on explicit transgressions of morality as a necessary means to other beneficial ends to a focus instead on more insidious threats. As Brian Leiter has argued, the greatest risk from morality is not in the explicit prohibitions it sets up and the strictures created by having to live in accordance with these prohibitions. It is instead a matter of the attitudes that morality more

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[17] Cf. Nehamas (1985), p. 227-8; Leiter (2002), p. 116.

[18] Williams (1981), p. 23.

subtly encourages, which run the risk of infecting great individuals.[19] Just to give one example: In a society in which pity is among the most lauded moral attitudes, a potentially great artist might come to wallow in self-pity instead of exercising a sort of stoical "hammer-hardness" against himself and producing a masterpiece (BGE, 225).

This family of interpretations, which I am including under the banner of the Argument from Consequences, all locate the problem with morality in its detrimental effects. Morality demands, or else more subtly encourages, that an individual live in a certain way, or that social institutions be arranged in a certain "moral" and "just" way, yet in doing so morality imperils the realization of human greatness and threatens the possibility of cultural achievement. Now whether this "moral infection," or "moral miasma" as it might be called, could *ever* undo a Nietzschean great individual, as this interpretation assumes, is a vexed matter that I shall treat later; given Nietzsche's other commitments, there is reason to doubt whether Nietzsche thinks that it *in principle* ever can. But we'll try to work out that tension in due course. Let us accept for the time being the view, which Nietzsche often seems to endorse, that the morality system *can* stifle potentially great individuals in ways more and less direct. Even if we accept this view, we will need to tread carefully. For the Argument from Consequences, especially in the subtle form of it that is most plausible, cuts the other way as well. If we allow that great individuals can be harmed by living in a world in which morality holds sway, and subtly breathing in its attitudes in ways that will threaten their potential for human excellence, then we should also allow, as Nietzsche himself does, that they will *benefit* from being in a culture in which moral norms prevail and incorporating *those* attitudes into their lives in various ways.

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[19] Leiter (2002), p. 133.

Take Leiter's own suggestion about the insidious effects of morality on artistic creativity. Attempting to offer a philosophical reconstruction of Nietzsche's position, he argues that if great individuals come to think that suffering is a bad thing that needs to be alleviated, this will indirectly encourage them to become averse to suffering themselves. On Leiter's reading, it is not so much that the great artist explicitly endorses this condemnation of all suffering whatsoever. After all, if the artist were thinking about things carefully, he would likely distinguish prudentially worthwhile from wholly worthless suffering–and condemn only the latter. The problem is rather that the artist unconsciously absorbs this *general aversion* to suffering from his cultural milieu.[20] And since being willing to suffer is a precondition of many great creative achievements, the influence of morality will have a stultifying effect on creative accomplishment.

Suppose that this is right. Nonetheless, this negative effect of morality is arguably counterbalanced by a positive one, produced by a countervailing cultural strand, which is indebted just as much to morality. And that is the tremendous glorification of suffering in at least one central branch of the morality family. Think of the crucifix prominently displayed with the tortured Christ nailed to the cross; or the tale of Job, tested by God; or of the countless stories of saints–flayed, grilled, pelted with stones, pierced with arrows, and otherwise tortured for their beliefs. Christianity is a veritable cult of suffering; indeed the only people more Romantic than the Romantics in their celebration of suffering are Christians. Surely *the calling* is very different for the Christian saint and the Nietzschean great individual. And granted, Christians think that there is "redemption" for their suffering in heaven. Perhaps it is even right

[20] Leiter (2002), p. 133.

that the Christian would prefer a world in which there is no suffering at all.[21] But we are talking about the *subtle and indirect* effects of living in a world where certain ideals prevail. If morality, on the one hand, threatens artistic accomplishment by suggesting–via its Schopenhauerian and utilitarian strands–that a life free from suffering is the best life, likely it has had just as suggestive a power in the other direction via its Christian strand: suggesting that the life of tortured self-sacrifice in the service of a noble cause is the highest human calling (at least during one's earthly life in this vale of tears).

As a matter of fact, the strong person needn't even be subtly swayed toward morality for it to be beneficial for him. Even as something to fight *against*, "the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia" has proved important. For it has "created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which had never yet existed on earth: with so tense a bow we can now shoot for the most distant goals" (BGE, "Preface").[22] Just consider the greatness of Nietzsche himself (and he, as his self-aggrandizing autobiography attests, is one of his favorite examples of someone great.) Would Nietzsche, the fulminator without equal, be half as interesting to read if he did not have Christianity or morality to spit upon? As he himself acknowledges, one needs a "profound appreciation of the value of having enemies...The church always wanted the destruction of its enemies; we, we immoralists and Antichristians, find our advantage in this, that the church exists" (TI, "Morality," 3). Even if on some level morality is to the disadvantage of people like Nietzsche, it is also to their advantage.

Furthermore, how about the stony demand of obedience to the moral law? That may have bad effects, if the great individual thinks that a moral law can never be broken, no matter

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[21] For this reading, see Reginster (2006), p. 160-1.

[22] For an illuminating discussion of Nietzsche's imagery of the tension in the bow, see Pippin (2010), p. 37n27 and p. 55-7.

what. Consider Gauguin again, if he thinks it is an unbreakable rule that obligations to one's family take precedence over one's artistic calling.[23] But this legacy of obedience, bequeathed by the moral tradition, has also had tremendously important effects, Nietzsche thinks, not so much in what is obeyed as in the *attitude* of obedience to law itself. As Nietzsche goes on to clarify, artists absorb this basic attitude of obedience and transform it for their purposes. No longer are they obedient to an other-regarding morality, but they retain the basic posture of obedience, albeit now to the "capricious laws" of artistic style. Their art benefits immensely as a result: "What is essential and inestimable in every morality is that it constitutes a long compulsion: to understand Stoicism or Port-Royal or Puritanism, one should recall the compulsion under which every language so far has achieved strength and freedom–the metrical compulsion of rhyme and rhythm" (BGE, 188). In the same passage, Nietzsche even suggests rather sweepingly that "all there is or has been on earth of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance, and masterly sureness" comes from this sort of subjection to law, not from a kind of unconstrained "*laisser aller*" (BGE, 188).

He continues with this line of argument, putting the mixed effects of morality's legacy of obedience in a world-historical light. He writes:

> What is essential "in heaven and on earth" seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be *obedience* over a long period of time and in a *single* direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worth while to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality–something transfiguring, subtle, mad, and divine. The long unfreedom of the spirit, the mistrustful constraint in the

[23] Williams (1981), p. 23.

> communicability of thoughts, the discipline thinkers imposed on themselves to think within the directions laid down by a church or a court, or under Aristotelian presuppositions, the long spiritual will to interpret all events under a Christian schema and to rediscover and justify the Christian god in every accident–all this, however forced, capricious, hard, gruesome, and anti-rational, has shown itself to be the means through which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility, though admittedly in the process an irreplaceable amount of strength and spirit had to be crushed, stifled, and ruined (for here, as everywhere, "nature" manifests herself as she is, in all her prodigal and indifferent magnificence which is outrageous but noble) (BGE, 188).

Notice the competing effects: "an irreplaceable amount of strength and spirit" is "crushed, stifled and ruined." But on the other hand, this "*obedience* over a long period of time and in a *single* direction" is an indispensable precondition for the development of "virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality," the things "for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth." This same recognition of double-sidedness marks what Nietzsche says in the *Genealogy* about morality, the brainchild of priestly machinations:

> ...with the priests *everything* becomes more dangerous, not only cures and remedies, but also arrogance, revenge, acuteness, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease–but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became *an interesting animal,* that only here

> did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*–and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts (GM, I:6).

Nietzsche thinks that it is "only fair" to point out that morality has had effects that cut both ways. In terms of these consequences, it is a danger to greatness, but it is also a boon.[24]

To see this mixture of positive and negative effects at work at the individual level, let us now turn to an actual historical case – Beethoven – one of Nietzsche's prime examples of someone great (BGE, 256). Had Beethoven spent his life ministering to the needs of the poor, or consumed with self-pity for his deafness, he would not have been able to produce the great works that he did. That subjunctive conditional is likely true. But here's another subjunctive conditional: Had Beethoven not drawn subtly on a moral backdrop (in Nietzsche's sense of "moral") in producing his works, he would not have been able to produce the greatest works that he did. *That* seems true as well.

Beethoven's personal religious beliefs are a matter of some dispute; they seem to have been mistily spiritual and far from doctrinaire.[25] But Beethoven's own beliefs aside, could he have produced the *Missa Solemnis*, an undeniably religious work at least in subject matter, outside of a Christian cultural context? Or how about the middle movement of his sublime Op. 132, where Beethoven uses to wonderful effect the Lydian mode, so reminiscent of medieval church music? The transcendent quality of this quartet, surely some of the most profound chamber music ever written, depends on the whole backdrop of religious associations that it

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[24] In fact, the world is in key respects going downhill without Christianity. In a notebook entry entitled, "Man owes the Christian Church," Nietzsche writes: "it made the European spirit fine and supple through its 'intolerance.' One sees right away, as is the case with freedom of the press in our democratic age, that thought becomes squat and dumpy." (KSA, 11:450 [1885]).

[25] See Solomon (1977), p. 263-4.

draws upon.[26] While Beethoven's own religious beliefs may be more difficult to pin down, his Enlightenment moral beliefs are inescapably clear. In the choral finale of his Symphony No. 9, Beethoven sets a text of deeply egalitarian moral sentiments to extraordinarily soul-stirring music. However grossly hypocritical he could sometimes be in his personal behavior, it is not as if Beethoven saw himself living by a wholly amoral credo. Far from it, in fact. In a letter of 1811, he goes so far as to say: "From my earliest childhood my zeal to serve our poor suffering humanity in any way whatsoever by means of my art has made no compromise with any lower motive."[27] And indeed, how about Beethoven's persona of the tortured, suffering artist, living only for his art?[28] Is this mode of life wholly unconnected with an undercurrent of Christian moral ideals about self-sacrifice and martyrdom in the service of a cause (even if *the cause itself* is different)? Would such an arch-Romantic ideal have arisen without Christianity? At the level of direct and indirect influences, morality–and this, remember, includes Christianity–was as much a benefit to Beethoven's greatness as a creative genius as it was a threat.

So too, we might say, when it comes to many of the peaks of culture, by Nietzsche's lights. How exactly was morality bad for the musical artistry of Bach, Händel, and Heinrich Schütz, "Germans of the strong race" (EH, "Clever," 7), composers Nietzsche very much

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[26] As the character Spandrell in Aldous Huxley's novel *Point Counter Point* says of this movement, "'It proves all kinds of things–God, the soul, goodness – unescapably. It's the only real proof that exists; the only one, because Beethoven was the only man who could get his knowledge over into expression.'" Huxley (1996) [1928], Chapter XXXVII, p. 425. While it surely doesn't "prove" anything of the sort, nor did Beethoven have "knowledge" of those things, that is an apt description of its spiritual aura.

[27] Quoted in Solomon, (1977), p. 36

[28] In Beethoven's moving letter (usually referred to as the "Heiligenstadt Testament") dated 6 October 1802 and addressed to his brothers, he describes how he overcomes his suicidal despondency over his deafness: "But what mortification if someone stood beside me and heard a flute from afar and *I* heard *nothing*; or someone *heard a shepherd singing*, and I heard nothing. Such happenings brought me close to despair; I was not far from ending my own life–only art, only art held me back. Ah, it seemed impossible to me that I should leave the world before I had produced all that I felt I might, and so I spared this wretched life..." in Weiss and Taruskin (1984), p. 326-7.

admires, yet composers whose greatest works are suffused to the core with the Christian worldview and its ideals, and whose works, Nietzsche thinks, are indebted to it in more subtle ways as well?[29] And what is one to say of the Italian Renaissance? It certainly looms preeminent in Nietzsche's estimation (A, 61). But is the greatness of the Renaissance even thinkable without the Christian worldview that centrally informed it?

We should not confuse this last question with another, related question of whether the Renaissance, or any other great creative flowering, in a person or a culture at large, would have been possible were there not also strong counter-forces to these Christian and more broadly moral ideals at the same time. For it is surely true that there were such countervailing, noble, life-affirming forces and that Nietzsche thinks they were essential (A, 61). We can even go so far as to deny, as Nietzsche does in *Twilight of the Idols*, that the greatest figures of the Renaissance were even at core Christians. Nietzsche writes: "a Christian who would at the same time be an artist simply does not occur. One should not be childish and object by naming Raphael or some homeopathic Christian of the nineteenth century. Raphael said Yes, Raphael *did* Yes; consequently, Raphael was no Christian." (Though perhaps Michelangelo would have been a much better example to illustrate Nietzsche's point, since his flair for homoerotic depictions of rippled musculature is rather more deeply at odds with Christian morality. But we shall stick with Raphael.) Even supposing Nietzsche is right in his rather ambitiously revisionary claim that Raphael is not at core a Christian, does it follow that Christianity *in the cultural background* was not a beneficial precondition for Raphael's being the great artist he was? Can we imagine the oeuvre of Raphael, stripped of the religious subject matter he draws upon in the *Disposition*, or

[29] In KSA, 11:451 [1885], Nietzsche points out how in the hidebound form of counterpoint writing, Bach finds his freedom as an artist.

the famous *Madonna and Child*, or the *Transfiguration*? Without these sorts of works, Raphael's corpus would be seriously depleted. Indeed, the sense in which it would still even be *Raphael's* corpus anymore under these circumstances is quite attenuated. Raphael came at a particular time in art history, in a particular cultural setting, faced with particular demands and particular artistic materials. His greatness consisted, in large part, in what he able to accomplish with – and despite – these.

This last point is a recurring theme in Nietzsche's work – *what one makes of what one is faced with*. This is particularly important, according to Nietzsche, when one is faced with something that has the potential to be a serious danger. Consider what Nietzsche says about Wagner in *Ecce Homo*. After describing Wagner as at once both a "toxin" and an "antitoxin," Nietzsche goes on to say: "...given the way I am, strong enough to turn even what is most questionable and dangerous to my advantage and thus to become stronger, I call Wagner the great benefactor of my life" (EH, "Clever," 6). For those who are strong enough, that which is "questionable and dangerous" can also be what is most beneficial. So too with morality; this *pharmakon*, dare one say, may be a poison, but it is also a potion for creativity.[30]

What, then, are we to make of Nietzsche's idea that the strong run the risk of being "sickened" by the moral values of the herd (GM, III:14)? We might think this "sickness" of morality is bad for them, pure and simple, as cow's milk is bad for human newborns.[31] But this would be a drastic oversimplification of Nietzsche's complex understanding of sickness. After all,

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[30] There is a more general point in the background: "How much one is able to endure: distress, want, bad weather, sickness, toil, solitude. Fundamentally one can cope with everything else, born as one is to a subterranean life of struggle; one emerges again and again into the light, one experiences again and again one's golden hour of victory – and then one stands forth as one was born, unbreakable, tensed, ready for new, even harder, remoter things, like a bow that distress only serves to make tauter" (GM, I:12).

[31] Leiter (2002), p. 106, applying to Nietzsche an example of Railton's (1986a).

when it comes to literal sickness, Nietzsche is far from thinking it need be a wholly bad thing for the person who is sick. Sickness can destroy people, to be sure. But it can also be a spur to greatness, so long as one is strong enough to turn the sickness to one's advantage, as he stresses he was able to do in his own case: "In the midst of torments that go with an uninterrupted three-day migraine, accompanied by a laborious vomiting of phlegm, I possessed a dialectician's clarity *par excellence* and thought through with very cold blood matters for which under healthier circumstances I am not mountain-climber, not subtle, not *cold* enough" (EH, "Wise," 1). When it comes to more metaphorical forms of sickness, like the "infection" of a person by a system of values, we should, as I have been urging, not see this infection as needing to be wholly a bad thing either. For it may be partly out of his sickness, both literal and metaphorical, that a person's greatness flows, as was the case with many of the artists and intellectuals Nietzsche admires–himself included. (This is a point that Thomas Mann, in a gesture replete with Nietzschean undertones, makes quite dramatically in *Doctor Faustus*, where he has the central character, the composer Adrian Leverkühn, contract syphilis to deepen his creativity.) In short, we don't do enough justice to morality when we say simply that it is a causal threat to the flourishing of the strong. Like a sickness, as Nietzsche understands it, it has both possible harms *and benefits.*

It might be conceded that perhaps in controlled enough doses, or when counterbalanced by stronger life-affirming forces, morality can be beneficial. But if a potentially great person becomes *too* taken with morality, then he will be stifled, his "*conscience*" will get "*poison[ed]*" (GM, III:14). Nietzsche, this argument will go, through his critique of morality wants to prevent this danger from taking hold. He is not, the revised claim will thus run,

opposed to all contact with or influence from morality more generally on the part of the nascently great.

Nietzsche does say we should "protect the well-constituted from the worst kind of air, the air of the sickroom" (GM, III:14). But this exhortation, we should notice, is in tension with other views he holds. Take Nietzsche's conviction, the leitmotif of *Ecce Homo*, that a truly great person will be able to turn questionable and dangerous things to his advantage. "A typically morbid being cannot become healthy...For a typically healthy person, conversely, being sick can even become an energetic *stimulus* to life, for living more" (EH, "Wise," 2). This is because the "well-turned out person," as he says, has "a taste only for what is good for him; his pleasure, his delight cease where the measure of what is good for him is transgressed. He guesses what remedies avail against what is harmful; he exploits bad accidents to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger" (EH, "Wise," 2).[32] Goethe, Beethoven, and Raphael (if Nietzsche is right about him) didn't need Nietzsche enlightening them with the exhortation to be life-affirming or with warnings not to underestimate the importance of suffering to great achievement; they did so by themselves, "exploit[ing] bad accidents to [their] advantage," because *that is what great people do*. Perhaps Nietzsche just sees himself as making explicit what was already implicit for these towering figures. Yet it remains puzzling why he is so worried about protecting the great individual from the "sickroom air" of morality, when he himself appears to deny that this bad air would ever pose a decisive threat to the genuinely great individual at all. Such people's constitutions and attitudes toward life prevent moral infections

[32] Nietzsche's point here becomes more plausible if he means "kill" [*umbringt*] in a looser sense, extending beyond literal death.

from being debilitating, since if they are truly great, they will be able turn "the questionable and dangerous" to their advantage.[33]

We are left with an apparent dilemma: Either morality's effect on the great person can be powerful enough to "stifle" or "crush" that person, or it cannot be powerful enough. If morality is powerful enough, then the person in question will not be a Nietzschean great individual anyway, since he is unable to turn the "questionable and dangerous" to his advantage, as Nietzsche thinks is criterial of being a great person. If, on the other hand, morality is not powerful enough to stifle the person, then morality turned out not to be a debilitating threat for the great individual after all. He flourished despite it; what didn't "kill" him made him stronger (EH, "Wise," 2). Either way, morality would not seem to be a decisive threat in terms of its causal consequences on the flourishing of the Nietzschean great individual.

Now this is of course in tension with Nietzsche's repeated suggestions that morality *has had* and *will have* bad effects (e.g., "an irreplaceable amount of strength and spirit" is "crushed, stifled and ruined," (BGE, 188), Cf., GM, I:12; A, 5). Perhaps the resolution is that morality has stifled many who, while strong, capable and intelligent far beyond the mass of mankind, were not up to the challenge of facing it and turning it to their advantage. Nietzsche, I suspect, is thinking of Pascal in this regard, when he calls him "the most instructive victim of Christianity" (EH, "Clever," 3; Cf., A, 5). But it would seem that the best Nietzschean conclusion is not the one he himself draws in GM III:14, of the following form: Morality threatens to undo the great by stifling them; so let us protect them from morality so that they have an easier time of things. It is instead: *If morality is successful at stifling a person, then ipso*

[33] What Nietzsche says about falling victim to pessimism presumably holds true of other moral "sicknesses" as well: "One falls victim to it as one falls victim to cholera: one has to be morbid enough in one's whole predisposition. Pessimism itself does not create a single decadent more" (TI, "Skirmishes," 36).

facto he is not great. Before there was Nietzsche, and his critique of morality, there were, by his own lights, great individuals, who managed quite well without him, because they made do ably with what they were faced with, whether it be Christianity or some other branch of the morality family. If they did not need his help when morality was an even stronger cultural force, why should they need it even more as morality weakens its social grip in the late 19th century? At the very least, this is an interpretive puzzle, representative of a serious tension in Nietzsche's work.

None of this is to deny that Nietzsche thinks that living in accord with morality (or more subtly, inhaling its vapors from the cultural surroundings) can have–and has had–many bad effects on human creativity and greatness. Nietzsche makes this abundantly clear in so many places in his work (e.g., TI, "Skirmishes," 38; A, 7, 11 and many others) But, by the same token, morality, as we have just seen can have and has had many *good* effects on human creativity and greatness too, effects that Nietzsche himself recognizes and celebrates. Both blame and praise can be laid at morality's door in this respect. Of course, just because morality has some good effects, we cannot reject the possibility that Nietzsche's main objection to morality is *still* grounded in its bad effects, since the bad effects might far outweigh the good ones. But even when it comes to the effects of morality on the elite cadre of Nietzschean great individuals–and the key claim of the Argument from Consequences is that *this* is where morality will be seriously deleterious–Nietzsche himself appears deeply conflicted: Sometimes he claims that morality poses a serious danger for the great, other times he claims that morality *cannot* be a danger for the great, since part of being great is to turn what could otherwise be dangerous to one's advantage. Most importantly, though, the Argument from Consequences suggests an odd sort

of commitment on Nietzsche's part. It can make it seem as though, as far as the Nietzschean values of perfectionism are concerned, things would have been better off had morality not arisen. But that, as I have suggested, is far from clear. Nietzsche describes again and again how as the result of morality we have become corrupted, sick, and decadent. But then again, it is thanks to morality that we have raised ourselves above the rest of the animals, acquired depth and become interesting (GM, I:6). It has been indispensable in helping us achieve "those things" ("art," "music," etc.) "for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth" (BGE, 188). Would he have us give that up and return to the state of the marauding nobles described in the First Essay of the *Genealogy*? This reversion to the past is not possible (TI, "Skirmishes," 43), nor is it desirable (GS, 377).

Given these interpretative challenges, it would be helpful to find some alternative Nietzschean foothold for his critique of morality, one that does pin his charges against morality solely or even primarily on morality's bad effects. And as I shall suggest in the section to follow, there is just such a foothold: We can interpret Nietzsche's critique as less practical than theoretical in spirit. He has room to object to the character of moral values *independently* of the mixed bag of effects they engender. This allows Nietzsche to acknowledge that morality's effects on the realization of perfectionistic values have basically been mixed, but still to hold that morality is thoroughly objectionable even despite this. In the section to follow, I will sketch the space for this alternative and offer textual evidence that supports the idea that these are among the considerations that Nietzsche appeals to.

VI. The Alternative: Morality's Character and the Character of the Moral

Nietzsche, in addition to charting morality's effects, both positive and negative, is, I will suggest, giving a "reading" of morality, as one might give an interpretation of a novel.[34] Just as one might read Hemingway with an eye toward extracting the worldview enshrined or expressed in his works, Nietzsche is looking to give a reading of various aspects of morality as an historical human institution by interpreting its features so as to draw out what he takes them to represent. And just as one might object to the ideals, values, and attitudes that one's interpretation takes to be in Hemingway's works–the swaggering troglodytic virility, say–Nietzsche is objecting to the ideals, values, and attitudes that, on his interpretation, are to be found in morality. One might thus describe him as objecting not just to the effects of morality, but to the character of the values themselves found in morality–and often, as we shall see, to the character of those people who are drawn to these values in addition.

To get a grip on the structure of the objection, compare the case of pornography and the criticism one might level against it.[35] One could take it to task for its troubling effects. As some have argued, pornography incites men to rape women. But suppose that its effects, on balance, turned out to be quite mixed, maybe even beneficial; perhaps empirical investigation shows that it actually *deters* crimes against women by giving men with certain violent sexual fantasies an alternative outlet. Still, one could object to pornography for the values one takes *it* to enshrine–as well as to the character of the people drawn to such values. Such criticism would be independent of what effects one takes pornography to have. I offer these prefatory remarks as a

[34] These analogies between Nietzschean philosophy and literature are a central feature of Nehamas's account (1985). He sees interpretation as a pervasive element in Nietzsche's philosophical practice.

[35] My thanks to Jack Spencer for suggesting this point of analogy.

first pass for characterizing the critical strategy against morality that Nietzsche frequently takes up. But rather than trying any further to describe in this abstract way what he is doing, let us look to some textual evidence and build our account from there.

Take, for example, his interpretation of the Christian concept of God. He frames the issue by suggesting the contrast between the pagan gods and the Christian God in terms of what they represent. He writes: "when everything strong, brave, masterful, and proud is eliminated from conceptions of God [*Gottesbegriffe*], when he degenerates step by step into a mere symbol, a staff for the weary, a sheet-anchor for the drowning, when he becomes the god of the poor, the sinners, and the sick par excellence...*what* does such a transformation bespeak?" [*wovon redet eine solche Verwandlung*] (A, 17). Here the issue is not so much what effects this view of God causes, but what values this conception of God, in the abstract, *enshrines.* And against such values, Nietzsche delivers a stinging verdict in the passage that follows: "The Christian conception of God–God as the god of the sick, God as a spider, God as spirit–is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth.[36] It may even represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the *contradiction* of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes!" (A, 18). The flaccid and impoverished values represented in this conception of the divine are not Nietzschean ones of strength, bravery, mastery, pride–as, he supposes, might be exemplified in a life-affirming pagan deity. As we shall see, Nietzsche's construals of various moral ideals and institutions are typically leveled in this

[36] Nietzsche continues, describing the intellectualist God that comes to prominence in early modern philosophy: "Even the palest of the pale were able to master [this God]: our honorable metaphysicians, those concept-albinos. They spun their webs around him until, hypnotized by their motions, he himself became a spider, another metaphysician. Now he, in turn, spun the world out of himself–*sub specie Spinozae*. Now he transfigured himself into something ever thinner and paler; he became an 'ideal,' he became 'pure spirit,' the 'Absolute,' the 'thing-in-itself.' The deterioration of a god: God became the 'thing-in-itself.'" (A, 17)

tendentious register. I don't seek to vindicate his interpretation and criticism as correct, or to adduce considerations for and against, but instead to make clear the critical manner in which he often proceeds.

He levels structurally similar charges against the conceptions of well-being that he regards as debased. Describing the reaction of his ideal person of "warrior" virtue, he writes: "The human being who has *become free*–and how much more the *spirit* who has *become free*–wipes his feet [*mit Füßen treten*][37] with the contemptible type of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats" (TI, "Skirmishes, 38). He of course mentions various people drawn to such a view of well-being, but notice that in the first instance it is this *idea* of well-being that is itself the explicit object of contempt. The ideal enshrines as supreme what is in Nietzsche's view a sort of well-being befitting cows–hence the mention of them in the list–a longing for the "green-pasture happiness of the herd" (BGE, 44) where human well-being is reckoned by the calculus of pleasure and pain. Guiding one's life by this vulgar ideal has the potential to lead to harmful (BGE, 225) and to beneficial effects (BGE, 61). But there is room to object *to it* independently of these effects, and that is a line of attack that Nietzsche here exploits.

Or take the example of ascetic ideals, the subject of the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*. Here Nietzsche makes his hermeneutically-minded approach very clear.[38] The issue for him is not simply about what effects ascetic ideals have had. For he begins the Third Essay with a question asking not what ascetic ideals have caused, but asking instead, "[w]hat do ascetic ideals

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[37] This is Nietzsche's play on words: This phrase literally means to "tread on with [one's] feet." This could therefore mean something like "trample underfoot," but more metaphorically it means to "regard with contempt." I here adopt Judith Norman's nice translation that captures a bit of both senses.

[38] As stressed by Nehamas (1985), esp. Chs. 4 and 7 and Pippin (1991), p. 84.

mean?" [*Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?*] (GM, III: 1). He is not, to be sure, asking what they "mean" in the sense of asking what their definition is; it is a much broader notion of "meaning"– that is, what they stand for, signal, reflect. He notes that they are a complex palimpsest. But out of this, Nietzsche distills what he takes ascetic ideals at core to enshrine: "[a] hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, [a] horror of the senses, of reason itself, [a] fear of happiness and beauty, [a] longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself" (GM, III:28). As Nietzsche goes on to spell out in the course of the Third Essay, ascetic ideals have had a range of effects both good and bad. They have poisoned humanity, infecting them with a hatred of life and of this-worldly things (GM, III:14). But they have also staved off death and nihilism by giving humans a goal to strive for, even if they are striving for something hollow (GM III:13, 28). And ascetic ideals ultimately lead to the "self-overcoming" of morality (GM, III:27) in the person of Nietzsche himself, since they are the kernel of his relentless honesty in facing the truth that many have been too timid to face. But apart from these mixed effects, ascetic ideals exude a worldview that Nietzsche regards as perverse and repugnant.

Nietzsche describes Christianity as animated by a similar sort of attitude, setting itself against worldly things with gusto. In his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," appended as an Introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886 (the year in which he published *Beyond Good and Evil* and was writing *On The Genealogy of Morals*), he writes:

> From the very outset Christianity was essentially and pervasively the feeling of disgust and weariness which life felt for life, a feeling which merely disguised, hid and decked

> itself out in its belief in "another" or "better" life. Hatred of the "world," a curse on the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a Beyond, invented in order better to defame the Here-and-Now, fundamentally a desire for nothingness, for the end, for rest, for the "Sabbath of Sabbaths" (BT, "Attempt," 5)

No doubt he is probably thinking of this attitude as manifested by particular Christians. But notice the way he couches things: it is a feature of *Christianity writ large*.

Often, though, the line between criticism of the worldview itself and criticism of its proponents blurs, and it is very difficult to tell whether Nietzsche is objecting to the attitude in the abstract or to the deficient character of the people who accept such views, or to both. Frequently it would appear to be both. Consider what Nietzsche says about the Christian ideal of immortality in *The Antichrist*:

> That everyone as an "immortal soul" has equal rank with everyone else, that in the totality of living beings the "salvation" of *every* single individual may claim eternal significance, that little gnats [*Mucker*] and three-quarter-madmen may have the conceit that the laws of nature are constantly broken for their sakes–such an intensification of every kind of selfishness into the infinite, into the *impertinent*, cannot be branded with too much contempt. And yet Christianity owes its triumph to this miserable flattery of personal vanity: it was precisely all the failures, all the rebellious-minded, all the less favored, the whole scum and refuse of humanity who were thus won over to it. The "salvation of the soul"–in plain language: "the world revolves around *me*" (A, 43).

The ideal is itself objectionable–it is so because it, for example, enshrines "the equal rank" of everyone, an idea that Nietzsche views as not simply false but as debasing; making rank so easy to come by devalues it into something no longer worth anything, like the status of "vice-president" in those companies where there are thousands holding this title. And moreover *the people* who accept this ideal are objectionable for their narcissistic vanity and especially for the fact that this overweening self-regard far exceeds what their actual characteristics warrant.[39] "[A]ll the failures, all the rebellious-minded, all the less favored, the whole scum and refuse of humanity" help themselves to a form of *undeserved* self-regard. Notice how Nietzsche draws attention to the hermeneutic dimension of what he is doing by suggesting that he is rendering in "plain language" what was concealed in the conventional Christian understanding of things. Nietzsche trades what he regards as an inaccurate or incomplete interpretation–"'the salvation of the soul'"–with another one–"'the world revolves around me.'" Now Nietzsche is of course noting an important effect here. People are "thus won over" to these Christian ideals, he says. But his charge just as much appears to be against the ideal itself and against the people drawn to it, as it is to this effect or to further downstream effects.

Consider, similarly, the passage from the *Summa Theologiae* that Nietzsche takes great relish in citing in the *Genealogy* (I:15).[40] Here Aquinas claims that the bliss of the saints in heaven is made all the better by being able to watch the torments of the damned down in hell. Whatever self-interpretation Christians may have of their hell as representing the triumph of

[39] It should be noted that Nietzsche has nothing against proud self-regard where that is warranted. The noble soul, as he says, "*has reverence for itself*" (BGE, 287)–and fittingly so.

[40] III, Supplementum, Q.94, Art. 1

"justice," Nietzsche puts a different spin on it–and on them. As he reads the notion of "hell," it is representative of the utmost Schadenfreude, of a sort that they are not honest with themselves about.[41] Rather than Dante's inscription over hell–"I too was created by eternal love"–Nietzsche says that "I too was created by eternal *hate*" would better capture the spirit of this heaven with an observation deck (GM, I:15).

The strategy of argument is even more vivid in the previous section of the *Genealogy* where Nietzsche imagines a character, Mr. Rash and Curious, descending into the "dark workshop" where ideals are manufactured. A sort of transformation is going on, this character reports back to Nietzsche, an attempt to make "whiteness, milk, and innocence of every blackness" (GM, I:14). The creators of morality are trying to carry off this transformation, so as to conceal what their ideals really are. Nietzsche here draws an analogy to art; he tells Mr. Rash and Curious to be attentive to "the most ingenious, most mendacious artistic stroke" of these "cellar rodents full of vengefulness and hatred" (GM, I:14) who seek to apply a concealing layer of prettifying paint to their ideals. "'The inoffensiveness of the weak man, even the cowardice of which he has so much, his lingering at the door, his being ineluctably compelled to wait, here acquire flattering names such as "patience"'" (GM, I: 14). Again, the aim here is to scrape off the layer of paint and to make manifest what is actually extolled by these ideals–here weakness and cowardice, marketing themselves under more appealing names.

Once could go through many more passages just like these. Kantianism, along with Platonism, enshrines a longing for a beyond– the "true world" behind this world (Cf., TI, "True World"). Democracy enshrines a hostility to rank, it "represents the disbelief in great human

[41] This pleasure in cruelty is not just true of Christianity, he thinks, but is a pervasive feature of many human institutions, such as public punishment, where torture is made into a communal festival, and guilt, where one gets to turn the knife against oneself (GM, II)

beings and an elite society" (WP, 752; KSA, 11:224). Its animating idea is that we are "'one and all self-seeking [*eigennütziges*] cattle and mob'" (WP, 752; KSA, 11:224). The unconstrained "will to truth," in longing for communion with The Truth as a kind of ersatz beatific vision, "*affirms another world* than that of life, nature, and history" (GM, III:25). The French revolution is the "world historical expression" of the "duality of idealist and rabble," that Nietzsche thinks is personified in Rousseau, "this first modern man...sick with unbridled vanity and unbridled self-contempt" (TI, "Skirmishes," 48). Nietzsche's concern, I have tried to argue, is not here with morality's bad effects *only*. It is also what with what is enshrined and expressed in morality.

Morality's expressive character diverges from what by Nietzsche's lights are the true values. But there are various ways of diverging from the truth, when it comes to values. What's distinctive here is that these are downright *perversions* of the real values by Nietzsche's lights: Instead of this world and life, they celebrate a beyond and another life. Instead of expressing strength, they express weakness. Cowardice in place of bravery. Humility in place of pride. Baseness instead of nobility. Equality instead of hierarchy. Bovine comfort instead of heroic striving. Self-deception instead of honesty. Elimination of the self instead of the artistic cultivation of the self. And so on. It's not just that they valorize the wrong things. They valorize either *the opposite* of the right things. Or else they get on to the right things, but in some grotesquely perverse extreme: healthy self-regard becomes cosmic narcissism; healthy self-mastery becomes self-tyranny, beneficial pruning of drives becomes a tyrannical obsession with extirpation, repression, castration of the drives entirely, the ability to take sustenance in beneficial illusions collapses into a life whose highest ideals are utter delusions. Morality's

evaluative compass is seriously out of whack, when it comes to tracking the values. It's not just that the needle is broken or wildly erratic. It's that it systematically points to the *anti-values.*

In the "Preface" to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche asks: Have moral values "hitherto hindered or furthered human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plentitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future" (GM, "Preface," 3). He might be read here as raising a question simply about the effects of morality on the flourishing of humanity. But notice what he literally says. He asks, in addition, what *the values themselves* are a "sign" of. He asks what is "revealed" *in them*. There are two objects of study here: the effects of the values on human flourishing (quite mixed, as we have seen) and the values themselves as *meaning-bearing entities to be interpreted*. I have suggested that this act of interpretation, carried out in the *Genealogy* and in Nietzsche's other main texts, seeks, among other things to reveal and to criticize the character of these values and the character of the people who are drawn to them.

VII. Conclusion

Now to conclude: On the central exegetical question, I've tried to show that the argument from consequences is saddled with several difficulties in its own right, and further, it can't make sense of the *extent* of Nietzsche's criticism of morality. I've presented an alternative that seeks to capture another strong strand we see in Nietzsche's work.

My aim has of course been primarily historical, to see what's actually going on when we look at Nietzsche's writings about morality. One lesson is that we have to be attentive to what Nietzsche himself is actually talking about when he talks of morality. The idea that he is the

arch-enemy of everything we would count as morality is borne of misunderstanding his subject matter, and it is a misunderstanding that I've tried to correct against. It is not the case that because Nietzsche is doubtful about morality, he thinks kicking dogs for fun is just fine. Nietzsche is not trying to get anyone to abandon morality, if by that one means abandoning all ways of behaving previously thought of as moral and permitting all those previously thought of as immoral. His view is far less radical than it can seem when we are attentive to how he is using his terms. As I have tried to suggest, it is not even clear that Nietzsche thinks humanity as a whole, or even the few great individuals, would have been better off without this institution of morality as a cultural force. Like so much else in human history, morality is a mixture of the good and the bad.

But in another way, his view *is* radical. He looks to many of the most cherished ideals, symbols, and practices of Western culture and interprets them in a diametrically different way than the proponents of these things. Where they see inspired ideals worthy of reverence, he sees idols worthy of contempt. Whatever their effects may be, these ideals, practices, symbols, he thinks, do not commend themselves to our admiration.

But what are we to make of all these construals of Nietzsche's? Is this notion of the character of the ideals, symbols, and practices of morality simply too murky and subject to controversy to bear any philosophical weight? Who is to say that Nietzsche is right in making these highly controversial construals? Can't one just as well see these moral ideals as expressing love and concern for others? The symbol of heavenly salvation as expressing hope for a better and truly more just world? Is there, indeed, a *fact of the matter* about the expressive character of something? For whom are these Nietzschean construals supposed to be persuasive? What are

people supposed to do in reaction to them? Are they just supposed smugly to share in, or be converted to, Nietzsche's reaction of disgust and contempt? Are his extreme interpretations, as I myself suspect, deliberate hyperbole on his part, getting at an important though partial dimension of the truth by bringing it out in a particularly vivid way? Is his extreme irreverence, as I myself also suspect, an exercise most of all in provocation, meant to shake up our complacent attitudes and get us to reevaluate our commitments, instead of making us abandon all of these commitments entirely? These are all difficult questions, to which no clear answers from Nietzsche's texts are forthcoming. I have just tried to show that if we look to his texts, we see an important strand of criticism that isn't focused simply on morality's effects.

There is much to be gained in getting inside someone else's very different way of approaching ethics. He does, as we saw, think there are things to be done and avoided (D, 103). But he is not so much in the business of giving us a theory for assessing the permissibility of discrete actions–based either on the consequences of those actions or based on considerations about the motives of the agent who performs them or whether they are in line with the categorical imperative or some other action-guiding directive. He is not, in this way, recommending some alternative version of normative ethics that's in this same rule-based theoretical mold.

Nietzsche's approach is instead more classical in focusing on character as the key object of assessment. But what is most interesting and unusual about his version is that it focuses not just on the character of individual people, but just as much on the character of symbols, practices, ideals, and institutions too. It is *their* defective character, as much as the defective

character of individuals, that is his target. We thus see another important respect in which Nietzsche's thought is at least as social as it is individualist in nature.

Even if we think Nietzsche's objections to morality are too one-sided and overwrought to take on board as the full truth, I do think the style of criticism is worth thinking about much more. He's exploiting an important logical space in leveling ethical or evaluative charges that criticize not just individuals but also institutions. And criticize these institutions not just on account of their effects, but on account of their defective character.

Chapter 6:
Nietzsche on the Standing of Values

I. Introduction

We just considered Nietzsche's vociferous criticisms of morality. But as we saw, Nietzsche's charges are leveled from the standpoint of his own profound ethical commitments. His "revaluation of all values" [*Umwerthung aller Werthe*][1] involves giving pride of place to the perfectionistic values concerned with human excellence and cultural accomplishment and criticizing many of the values associated with "morality," in Nietzsche's particular sense of that term. But a natural question to ask is the following: Does Nietzsche take his own perfectionistic conception of the good to be *correct*–or at least more accurate–in picking out what really matters? Or does he think, when it comes to values, that it is just a matter of bare preferences, to which no standards of accuracy could apply?

In the Preface to his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche sets as his task to enquire into the "value" [*Werth*] of our "values" [*Werthe*]. By framing the question in this way, Nietzsche would appear to be using the term "value" in two different senses.[2] He uses it in an anthropological sense to pick out the ideals and codes of conduct that people have thus far *taken* to be valuable. When he writes, particularly in the plural, of values and traces their genealogy, he would appear, in the same spirit, to be using the term as if in inverted commas, with no commitment on his part to the genuine standing of the "values" under consideration. Let us call these *values in the descriptive sense*. Yet when Nietzsche considers what *value* these values

[1] This phrase also served as Nietzsche's tentative title for his planned *magnum opus*, only the first component of which, *The Antichrist*, he completed. He uses similar terms in TI, "Preface"; A, 13; and EH, "Destiny," 1.

[2] Clark and Dudrick (2007) are sensitive to a similar distinction. See also Schacht (1983), p. 348.

themselves have, he would seem to be using the term "value" in a more loaded way, where it is reflective (at the very least) of what *he* takes to be valuable. The question for us is whether Nietzsche thinks his own judgments on this front have any claim to accuracy. I take it that Nietzsche thinks that it is uncontroversial that certain things are instrumentally valuable for a given agent, relative to his or her contingent ends. The question in the offing in this chapter is whether there is also some more ambitious notion of value in his work apart from this, where being a value is a matter of being adequate to the evaluative truth. Let us call these *genuine values*.

By framing the meta-axiological issue in this way, I am trying to remain true to the spirit of Nietzsche's own way of conceptualizing things. The primary normative entities that he concerns himself with are "values" [*Werthe*], not reasons, oughts, etc. Although we may notice affinities Nietzsche has with certain contemporary categories–such as naturalist or non-naturalist, cognitivist or non-cognitivist, internalist or externalist about reasons–we must tread very carefully before slotting him into any of these categories.[3]

One must stress at the outset that this is a particularly thorny exegetical issue. The textual evidence is scant. Nietzsche never sets out his views systematically. And often, when he is speaking of the status of "values," it is unclear whether he has in mind simply the descriptive sense or something beyond this. Even assuming that Nietzsche is seeking to pronounce on matters meta-axiological in the passages when he discusses the status of "values," what he says in a given snippet of text is often compatible with a number of different views, some of which allow for certain values to be accurate to the evaluative truth. When it comes to extracting a well-

[3] The particular danger is in moving from a claim that Nietzsche does *not* fall into one of these contemporary categories to a claim that he thereby falls into the opposing category.

articulated and philosophically rigorous meta-axiology from Nietzsche's texts, we will, I think, look to them in vain, because they underdetermine where he stands on these important issues. This has done little to deter the burgeoning cottage industry on Nietzsche's meta-ethics and meta-axiology, which has attributed to him everything from realism (objective and subjective) to nihilism to expressivism to fictionalism to constitutivism.[4] My goal in this chapter is modest, but important: It is *not* to attribute to Nietzsche some sophisticated meta-axiological view, because I am doubtful that he has one. It is, however, to show that Nietzsche's texts do not necessitate the skeptical meta-axiological positions that have been attributed to him in the recent literature.[5] And it is thereby to suggest that we needn't give up on the idea that Nietzsche takes the values he champions to have real evaluative standing–and not because he has some sophisticated realist theory to this effect, but in a more philosophically unreflective way. I want to begin by discussing two important preliminary issues that will need to inform our discussion going forward. This stage-setting will be the task of sections II and III, then we will continue with the exegesis in the sections to follow.

II. The Linguistic Turn

Contemporary meta-ethics sometimes draws the party lines of meta-ethics around questions informed by the philosophy of language, questions about whether moral discourse is truth apt, questions about whether it is describing reality or doing something else, such as

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[4] For example: Objective realism–Schacht (1983); Subjective realism–Reginster (2006); Nihilism–Leiter (2000); Expressivism–Clark and Dudrick (2007); Fictionalism–Hussain (2007); Constitutivism–Katsafanas (2011).

[5] Among the strongest arguments given in the recent literature for seeing Nietzsche as a meta-axiological skeptic–that is, as someone claiming that no values have genuine evaluative standing– are those of Leiter, (2000); Leiter (Forthcoming) and of Hussain (2007). In this chapter I will be in dialogue with these readings as the best representatives of the interpretation opposed to mine.

expressing our attitudes or our commitment to a system of norms, and so on. Many would go so far as to say that meta-ethics *just is* the philosophy of language, albeit the philosophy of the domain of moral language specifically.

This, for better or worse, is a contemporary development, and it is not how Nietzsche himself thinks about meta-ethics or meta-axiology. As Brian Leiter has rightly noted, Nietzsche simply does not have worked out views about the semantics of moral language.[6] We do not, it seems to me, have textual grounds for situating him in contemporary debates set up in these terms. Some in the secondary literature on Nietzsche have, however, interpreted Nietzsche as committed to positions on these semantic questions and have tried to place Nietzsche in one linguistically-framed category or another.[7] Insofar as these interpretations take a stand on what Nietzsche, in the first instance, sees *moral language* as doing or as able to do, I am concerned that these are anachronistic ways of reading Nietzsche. Yet regardless of where interpreters stand on these semantic issues, they can, on independent grounds, take a position on the metaphysical question of whether there are facts, to which our evaluative thought and talk can be accurate. We should thus be careful not to dismiss readings of Nietzsche's meta-axiology *simply* on the grounds that they take a stand on these semantic questions. The basic question to be asked about Nietzsche's meta-axiology essentially is this: Could Nietzschean ethics be getting something right, say, that a form of utilitarianism devoted to the "green-pasture happiness of the herd" (BGE, 44) is getting wrong?[8] I have couched this question as one about the "standing" of

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[6] Leiter (2000).

[7] Hussain (2007); Clark and Dudrick (2007).

[8] Leiter (2000) frames Nietzsche's central questions as follows: "Is there any fact of the matter about ethical issues? This loosely framed metaphysical question evokes a family of related questions as well: Are there absolute moral truths or are moral judgments always relative? Does the world contain objective moral properties or are moral properties simply human projections on a morally neutral universe?" p. 278.

values. If one thinks that there are some values that are correct, or at least more accurate or more adequate to the evaluative truth, then one thinks that there are some genuine values–that is, values with standing.

III. Meta-Axiology, Not (Simply) Meta-Ethics

Now for the second preliminary issue. Much of the existing secondary literature in this general area focuses on the question of Nietzsche's *meta-ethics*. I want to avoid making that issue the exclusive concern of this chapter for three main reasons.

The first consideration has to do more with the connotation of "meta-ethics" than with the actual extension of what it can investigate. Although in theory meta-ethics casts a broad net, so as to encompass investigation into the standing of a range of non-moral values as well, in practice it can sometimes end up as something that might be better described as meta-morality. There is a danger of thinking that the question on the table here is one about Nietzsche's views about the standing of *morality* (in his sense) exclusively. But the question, we must remember, is as much about the standing of Nietzsche's own values as it is about the standing of the values of morality. These two sorts of values needn't be fellow travelers: Nietzsche can be dubious about moral values (*qua* moral values at least) without being dubious about the standing of values *tout court*.

Second, questions of both ethics and meta-ethics frequently take on a *practical* cast. The first-order question often is thought to be "What ought I to do?" or "What do I have reason, or most reason, to do?" And the meta-ethical question then is, "In virtue of what does this 'ought' have authority?" Or: "What makes it the case that I have reason, or most reason, to do x?" "Are

these reasons rooted in what my ideally rational self would desire for me to desire?" "Must they be anchored in my subjective motivational set?" And so on. What I am calling the *practical* approach, for deontologists and for many consequentialists alike, is of course a very natural way of thinking about ethics, and thus about meta-ethics. Some may even regard it as the *sine qua non* of this branch of philosophy. I don't mean to suggest that meta-ethics would necessarily *need* to concern itself with the standing of various practical claims exclusively. But given the tendency of some of its practitioners to focus their work in this way, I want to be abundantly clear that this is not my focus here.

An exclusive focus on the practical is an overly restrictive and distorting approach for dealing with Nietzsche's value theory.[9] Nietzsche, to be sure, is interested in the practical perspective, and in particular, he is interested in giving an historical account of the genesis of this perspective, as Christine Korsgaard has rightly pointed out.[10] Nietzsche is also of course interested in many ethical questions framed from the practical perspective–if not, to be sure, from a Kantian agential perspective.[11] But it would be a mistake to refract Nietzsche's *entire discussion of values*, and thus his discussion about the standing of values, through the lens of the practical question of what actions a given agent ought or has reason to perform. Nietzsche is not primarily concerned with generating an account whose goal is to prescribe or to assess actions that must be performed. Rather, he is concerned with making critical evaluations about

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[9] Geuss (2006).

[10] Korsgaard (1996), p.158-60.

[11] See, for example, Nietzsche's vehement rejection of Kant's ideas about the importance of acting from the motive of duty in A, 11, or his discussion of the duty (presumably in some non-Kantian sense) of higher human beings to treat lower human beings tenderly in A, 57.

individuals and cultures.[12] From these evaluative claims, Nietzsche does not thereby always try to *derive* practical claims about what people ought or have reason to do, so as then to assess, perhaps to indict people–especially for irrationality–if they fail to live in accordance with or to promote what they recognize to be valuable.[13]

Because of this focus on the evaluative more than on the directive, the axiological and meta-axiological structure of Nietzsche's value theory is arguably in the mold more of aesthetics than of ethics, at least as ethics is often conceived of today. We praise artists for realizing aesthetic values in their works. We look down on others for creating works that are, say, tawdry or shallow. But the normative question, in the first instance, is primarily one of evaluation, not of action-guiding directive, especially one backed up by the commands of reason. Consider the typical relation between first and second-order evaluations in aesthetics. At the first-order level, the question is an evaluative one: Is this painting any good? At the meta-level, the question is about the standing of that evaluation itself. Is it objective? Subjectively universal, as Kant would have it? A matter of the idiosyncratic preference of a given person or clique? There are no doubt questions to be asked about what is to be done in light of these aesthetic values. Are we to contemplate the painting frequently? Preserve it from destruction at all costs? Effect a radical life transformation, as the speaker in Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" feels called to do in the

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[12] Thompson (2008) distinguishes between what she calls "directives" (e.g., John ought to be kind his brother) and "evaluatives" (e.g., John is a good person) as two basic kinds of normative judgments, p. 2. In these terms, we should describe Nietzsche as concerned as much (and perhaps more) with evaluatives as with directives. Railton (Forthcoming) makes a similar point, p. 9. More recently, Railton has distinguished among three different families of normative concepts, adding the *regulative* in addition to the evaluative and the directive. (Railton, personal communication.)

[13] Much of the normative thinking that Nietzsche criticizes is strongly prescriptive in orientation, and its prescriptions are supposed to be anchored in the dictates of reason. Socrates, Plato, and Kant are some of the most prominent representatives of this venerable tradition of trying "with a stiff seriousness that inspires laughter...to supply a *rational foundation*" for morality (BGE, 186). Though Nietzsche is far from being an "irrationalist"– the charge peddled by Lukács (1971) Ch. III, Habermas, (1990), Ch. IV and others – Nietzsche is not a "rationalist" either in that he does not seek to anchor morality or values in the dictates of reason.

presence of the fragmentary statue? But these are downstream, as it were, from questions about the work's value, downstream regardless of what one thinks is responsible for underwriting these claims of what one should do ("internal" or "external" reasons in the contemporary lingo). This is because the question about the work's value is not, in the first instance, a practical question about actions or potential actions.[14] In the case of aesthetics, it seems bizarre and strained always to try to turn it into one. Nietzsche often takes up this aesthetics-influenced approach to evaluative questions, even when it comes to questions that have to do not just with art narrowly, but with life more generally.

This may, however, tempt us into thinking that what we need is meta-aesthetics, rather than meta-ethics, when it comes to understanding the standing of Nietzsche's values. But this too would be a mistake. When we consider the sorts of values Nietzsche celebrates, such as the "*Pracht*" – or the magnificence – of the greatest human beings (GM, "Preface," 6), it would seem that they are in a sort of overlapping space between aesthetics and ethics. *Pracht* is certainly not a moral value, in Nietzsche's sense of "moral." Is this an aesthetic value instead? Or an ethical value, by the lights of a Nietzschean perfectionistic ethics? There is perhaps a case to be made for both, so long as the categories of the ethical and the aesthetic are construed broadly enough. But there is little point, I think, in trying to shoehorn this kind of value into either category, given the associations both terms can often conjure up– the aesthetic as having to do with art or beauty specifically, the ethical as having to do primarily with morality and with the practical stance. It is better just to say that Nietzsche celebrates certain values. At the second-order level,

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[14] Even if one thinks that in making a judgment of aesthetic merit, one is thereby necessarily disposed to do certain things or have certain desiderative attitudes toward the work of art, the judgment is not *itself* one about potential actions one ought to perform. Nietzsche, unlike his predecessors Kant and Schopenhauer, holds that the judgment of beauty is not "disinterested" but is itself inextricably bound up with certain desires on the part of evaluator (Cf., GM, III:6). This theme gets contemporary treatment in Nehamas (2007).

the question is then best thought of as one not of meta-ethics narrowly, but of meta-axiology more broadly, the question being: what evaluative standing does Nietzsche take his own preferred values to have, compared to other conceptions of the good? Does Nietzsche see himself as getting something right that others are getting wrong?

IV. Skepticism About the Standing of Values

According to an influential reading, Nietzsche does not accord genuine evaluative standing to *any* values, including his own favored values.[15] That perfectionistic values triumph is for Nietzsche nothing more than his own preference. The vehemence with which Nietzsche trumpets his own values and denounces those of others is highly misleading, proponents think. Nietzsche resorts to this impassioned rhetoric because he wants to use all the means at his disposal to persuade others (potential Nietzschean "higher types" or "free spirits" anyway) to abandon their current preferences and to adopt his. But, on this reading, he does not think that his values could really be better in the sense of being more accurate or adequate to the evaluative truth. In this section and the one to follow I will consider the most prominent interpretive arguments for this skeptical position and question whether they are adequately supported by Nietzsche's texts.

Nietzsche has recently been thought to advocate an "argument from disagreement," a precursor of the sort that are sometimes given in contemporary meta-ethics. On this interpretation, Nietzsche argues from the fact of seemingly intractable disagreement about value claims and draws the abductive inference that there is no fact of the matter underlying these

[15] Leiter (2000) and Hussain (2007).

competing claims.[16] Regardless of the philosophical merits or demerits of this sort of argument, let us begin by considering what textual evidence we have for thinking that Nietzsche accepts an argument of this form.[17]

The strongest exegetical evidence proponents marshall for this interpretation is a passage from the *Nachlaß* :

> It is a very remarkable moment: the Sophists verge upon the first *critique of morality*, the first *insight* into morality [*Moral*]:– they juxtapose the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of moral value judgments; –they let it be known that every morality can be dialectically justified; i.e, they divine that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily sophistical– a proposition later proved on the grand scale by the ancient philosophers, from Plato onwards (down to Kant);– they postulate the first truth that a "morality-in-itself," a "good-in-itself" do not exist, that it is a swindle to talk of "truth" in this field (WP, 428).[18]

From this notebook entry, it is not clear that Nietzsche is making the strong abductive inference that the argument from disagreement would require. When Nietzsche appeals to the sophists, citing their conclusion that it is "a swindle to talk of 'truth'" in this field, the relevant field would seem to be that of morality in particular, not obviously the field of values in

[17] For sensible skepticism about this sort of argument, see Reginster (2006), p. 60.

[18] Cited in Leiter (Forthcoming).

general.[19] But putting this consideration aside, the passage, as something that Nietzsche never published, is itself of questionable pedigree to begin with.[20] Much of this notebook material is sketchy and ill-considered and for good reason never makes it into the polished works Nietzsche chose to publish.[21] When we look to his published works, there is strong evidence that Nietzsche *definitively rejects* this sort of argument from disagreement. In Book V of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche derides as "childish" the argument made by those who "see the truth that among different nations moral valuations are *necessarily* different and then infer from this that *no* morality is at all binding" *[einen Schluss auf Unverbindlichkeit* aller *Moral machen]*. (GS, 345). If Nietzsche will not even accept a form of this argument for undermining morality in particular, he surely will not accept it for undermining all values, including non-moral values. The textual case for attributing an argument from disagreement to Nietzsche is weak indeed.[22]

A second argument appeals to Nietzsche's frequent comparison of value judgments to matters of taste.[23] Nietzsche, for example, notes: "What is now decisive against Christianity is our taste, no longer our reasons," (GS, 132). From the fact that Nietzsche appeals to taste in his criticism of the values of others, it might be inferred that he thinks there are no standards of correctness in this realm.[24] But at the very least, it is far from obvious that someone as elitist and

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[20] Leiter (2000), p. 287.

[21] Leiter (2000), p. 287.

[22] Leiter, (Forthcoming). Leiter does not account for GS, 345. In the three other passages he cites from the published corpus (BGE 5, 186, and 187), there is no evidence that Nietzsche is taking a skeptical stand, on the basis of an argument from disagreement, toward the standing of values in general. Nietzsche's claims in these passages are all more modest.

[23] Leiter, (Forthcoming), p. 26-7.

[24] Leiter, (Forthcoming), p. 26-7.

snobbish as Nietzsche would think that there are no standards of correctness in matters of taste, so that the tastes of the "rabble" (*Pöbel*– one of his favorite terms of abuse) are not *really* worse than his are. "One must," as Nietzsche says, "shed the bad taste of wanting to agree with many" (BGE, 43). This, first and foremost, is because Nietzsche thinks *many have bad taste*. "Books for all the world are always foul-smelling books: the smell of petty people clings to them. Where the people eat and drink, even where they venerate, it usually stinks. One should not go to church if one wants to breathe *pure* air" (BGE, 30). Nietzsche's remarks about taste do not lend any comfort to meta-axiological skepticsim, unless one just begs the question from the start with the far-from-obviously-Nietzschean assumption that there is no genuine privilege that one person's taste can have over another's.

A third skeptical argument often attributed to Nietzsche is an "argument from best explanation." Such an argument would see Nietzsche as doing something quite ambitious. It would see him as holding that appeals to genuine values (that is, values with standing) are idle, since we can explain human evaluative commitments by reference to non-evaluative facts.[25] The best explanation for why people cling to the value claims that they do is not that they are cottoning on to the truth of the questions at issue, but that they have certain social, psychological, and physical needs that drive them to make these particular claims about what is of value, regardless of how the world stands axiologically.

Nietzsche does think, as a matter of historical genealogy, that he can explain why many people come to endorse the evaluative worldviews that they do by appealing to features of their social, psychological, and physical condition. It is far more controversial, however, whether Nietzsche takes his explanations to lead to the sort of radical eliminativism about genuine values

[25] Leiter (2002), p. 148.

that would be needed to underwrite skepticism about the standing of any values. Even proponents of this view note that Nietzsche does not explicitly draw this conclusion himself.[26] Moreover, if Nietzsche did opt for a sort of eliminativism about a range of different values in particular (namely, those of morality), he wouldn't need to be eliminativist about all values, including his own perfectionist values. Indeed, even stipulating that Nietzsche thinks one can explain all evaluative commitments by reference to wholly non-evaluative facts about the people with those commitments and their environment, it is contentious, on purely philosophical grounds, that the strong eliminativist conclusion should follow. This recognition may be grounds for something weaker, perhaps epistemic humility about one's first-order value judgments, or agnosticism about the standing of values, instead of outright skepticism about the standing of any values. After all, it may be overdetermined why people accept the values that they do, or it may be that non-evaluative considerations simply have more explanatory heft than evaluative ones, even though there are nonetheless genuine evaluative truths.

And it is bears pointing out how questionable, as a reading of Nietzsche, the claim is that one can explain all evaluative facts in non-evaluative terms. Nietzsche's "explanations," such as they are, are far from being couched in wholly non-evaluative, cooly scientific terms. In the First Essay of the *Genealogy*, for example, his explanations would seem, on the contrary, to make use of the thick concepts of nobility [*Vornehmheit*] and baseness [*Gemeinheit*], concepts in which an evaluative dimension arguably is already built in. The nobility of certain people, he appears to think, explains why they have the value commitments that they do, and the baseness of others explains why they have the value commitments that they do. (GM, I:10-11). Nietzsche might

[26] As Leiter (2002) himself notes, p. 148.

well think that these apparently thick categories are wholly reducible to non-evaluative characteristics, but that seems unlikely given the explanantia he cites.

Explanatory arguments with skeptical conclusions have played an important role in meta-ethics during the past half century, and one may wish to make Nietzsche out to be a forerunner of this tradition. Yet, as with attributing Nietzsche the last two positions we considered as well, the textual evidence for doing so is at best indecisive.

V. Skepticism About the Metaphysical Objectivity of Value?

So far, we have considered skeptical arguments Nietzsche might be attributed. Proponents of the skeptical interpretation think they find even more decisive evidence that regardless of whether he had a convincing argument for the view, Nietzsche issues a blanket denial that values are part of the fabric of mind-independent reality.[27] Two passages in the *The Gay Science* (301) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (I, "On the Thousand and One Goals") can seem to suggest such a view. But as I will suggest in this section, the textual evidence is far more ambiguous and less decisive than proponents of this interpretation have recognized. First of all, it is not even clear that Nietzsche is making a claim about meta-axiology at all in these passages. He may well be talking about values in what I am calling the *descriptive* sense. Second, even supposing Nietzsche were making a claim about the metaphysics of (genuine) value, it is not clear what bearing he would be taking this metaphysics to have on the question of whether any of these values could have genuine standing–in the sense of being more adequate to the evaluative truth.

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[27] Leiter (1999); Hussain (2007); Katsafanas (2011) also draws on this passage as evidence that Nietzsche thinks that "[t]here are no objective values, or there are no objective facts about what is valuable," p. 624.

In *The Gay Science* he writes, "Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself [*an sich*], according to its nature [*seiner Natur nach*]–nature [*Natur*] is always valueless, but has been given value at some time, as a present–and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it" [wir *waren diese Gebenden und Schekenden*] (GS, 301)].[28] Such textual evidence might seem to militate very strongly against attributing an ontologically robust metaphysics of value to Nietzsche. Many thus read Nietzsche as here claiming that values are simply a projection of our attitudes onto axiologically neutral reality and not part of the mind-independent world.[29]

But we have to remember that Nietzsche uses "value" / "values" in two quite different senses. The descriptive sense is more social and anthropological. The other sense is more

[28] By way of comparison, note the charge he goes on to lay at Christianity's doorstep in *The Antichrist*: "For one must understand this: every natural custom, every natural institution (state, judicial order, marriage, care of the sick and the poor), every demand inspired by the instinct of life–in short, everything that contains its value *in itself* [*was seinen Werth* in sich *hat*] is made altogether valueless, *anti*-valuable by the parasitism of the priest (or the "moral world order")... (A, 26). In castigating the priests, he explicitly refers to "everything that has its value in itself" [*Alles, was seinen Werth* in sich *hat*], on this reading anyway, presupposing just what some take him to deny in *The Gay Science* (301). Although as with the GS passage (301) and the TSZ passage ("On the Thousand and One Goals"), I think the best reading is one that does not see Nietzsche as treating meta-axiological issues at all.

[29] This is a pillar of Hussain's (2007) interpretation. Hussain's project is to attribute to Nietzsche a kind of fictionalism about value discourse. On Hussain's reading, Nietzschean "free spirits" can "create values." By that Hussain means that they create *pretenses* to the effect that things are valuable, and talk as if there are values, all the while having the clear-eyed recognition that all of this is just illusory, since there really are no values. Even if one is unmoved by Hussain's attribution of fictionalism to Nietzsche, one can still grapple with the meta-axiological claim that is in the background of Hussain's view, explaining why this fictional discourse about value is necessary in the first place. According to Hussain, Nietzsche accepts a sort of "nihilism" according to which, in Hussain's words, "nothing has value in itself" (p. 159). But how is Hussain using the term "nihilism"? In the passage I just quoted, he is using it to characterize the meta-axiological thesis that "nothing has value in itself." Let us call this *meta-axiological nihilism*. This is in keeping with how the term is used in contemporary philosophy–as a meta-ethical or meta-axiological thesis. Yet how does Nietzsche himself use the term "nihilism"? Hussain gets things right when he goes on, a few pages after the passage I just quoted, to distinguish between theoretical and practical nihilism. He writes: "Theoretical nihilism is the belief in valuelessness, or as Nietzsche often puts it, goallessness," while "[p]ractical nihilism consists in a range of psychological and sociological phenomena" that are the consequence of having this theoretical belief (p. 161). Both of these senses *are* well-anchored in Nietzsche's work. The trouble is this: Hussain runs together theoretical nihilism and meta-axiological nihilism, but these are not equivalent. Theoretical nihilism is a claim about *what people believe* about the standing of values, not what is in fact true about the standing of values. This difference gets elided because Hussain is talking about what he takes to be Nietzsche's own philosophical positions: Given that Nietzsche, on Hussain's reading, is a meta-axiological nihilist (believing "nothing has value in itself") then he is thereby going to be a theoretical nihilist (also believing "nothing has value in itself"). Yet Nietzsche can think that theoretical nihilism is pervasive in modern culture, without thereby necessarily endorsing meta-axiological nihilism himself. He could simply hold that many have this theoretical belief about the standing of values *mistakenly*, perhaps because they wrongly think it follows from the "death of God."

axiologically loaded. Nietzsche takes the "*value of these values*"(GM, "Preface," 6) as a serious question to be considered, and not as a pleonasm, precisely because these two different senses of "value" are at work. It is an open question for Nietzsche whether certain "values" (in the descriptive sense) are genuine values with standing.

We should then ask: In the places where he talks about values being created, what sense of values does he have in mind? As social or anthropological entities, values do indeed get created when people, normative systems, and societies *take* or *proclaim* things to be valuable. Such "values" needn't have any meta-ethical or meta-axiological import, though; Christianity and slave morality are systems of values in just such a sense. While Nietzsche could *also* have in mind something of meta-axiological import–for example, that since values are created there are no genuine values–we are not compelled to extract this dramatic meta-axiological theory from the text.

Thus, when he raises doubts about whether values are part of the mind-independent fabric of reality (e.g., GS, 301), what sense of values does he have in mind? As a social or anthropological category, value surely cannot be independent of the activities and practices of human beings, any more than the institution of money can. But what of the fact of certain values *really being* valuable? Can *that* be independent of human practices of valuing? Again, it is difficult to know what he thinks. Yet we should be careful not simply to assume that he is making meta-axiological claims, when it is not clear from the texts whether he is.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, however, that he is making the ambitious meta-axiological claim here and claiming that values (understood as those things which are actually valuable) are not part of mind-independent reality. Still, the idea that values come through a

"bestowal" can be given a number of construals, some compatible with the idea of certain values having genuine standing, so that some value claims are more accurate than others. Nietzsche might be suggesting, in the spirit of Euthyphro, that this gift, when bestowed by the right sort of people, creates values with genuine standing.[30] When Euthyphro suggests that the gods' loving something makes it pious, he presumably is not claiming it is thereby pious ***only for them***.[31] The beloved thing is thereby made pious *for everyone*, though it is not, "in itself" or "by its nature" pious. Nietzsche could have a similar view in mind about the grounding of values, perhaps with the genuine philosophers described in *Beyond Good and Evil* (211) as the creators of value. He could also have a view on which values are secondary qualities, and thus dependent on humans and their sensibilities and proclivities.[32] The text underdetermines which, if any, of these positions he should be attributed.

But notice that even if he denies the strong metaphysical objectivity of values, he doesn't *thereby* undermine the possibility that some values might have genuine evaluative standing. For on the view inspired by Euthyphro's or on the secondary qualities view, a denial of the strong metaphysical objectivity of values is compatible with thinking that some values nonetheless have standing. So while we do not have enough evidence for attributing to him one of these meta-axiological views in particular, we also do not have enough evidence for attributing to him the view that no values enjoy evaluative standing simply on his remarks about values not being part of the fabric of reality.

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[30] It would of course be a difficult question how to identify such people.

[31] *Euthyphro* 10d

[32] My thanks to Errol Lord for suggesting this possibility as also potentially compatible with what Nietzsche says.

Nietzsche continues with these sorts of claims in his next book the following year, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where the title character says similar things about humans being the "creators" of values:

> Only man placed values in things to preserve himself – he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he calls himself "man," which means: the esteemer. To esteem is to create: hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure. Through esteeming first is there value *[Durch das Schätzen erst giebt es Werth*][33]: and without esteeming, the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear this, you creators." (TSZ, "On the Thousand and One Goals"):

This passage, similar to the one from *The Gay Science*, is just as naturally read as making a claim about values in the descriptive sense, as sociological or anthropological entities. Nietzsche is throughout emphasizing the human dimension in the creation of these sorts of values. He is encouraging us to realize that particular value systems have been the contingent creation of human beings at particular times in history, as the result of what they happen to esteem, whether honor or piety or loyalty or self-abnegation. His aim in the passage is to explain how *coming to regard* certain things as valuable ends up furthering the interests of particular human

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[33] Kaufmann renders this: "Through esteeming alone is there value." This translation of "*erst*" is most naturally read as prejudging the issue of whether esteeming x is a sufficient condition for x to be a value. It is making it seem as if being a value comes about *solely though* the esteeming. (Although, it bears pointing out that a partisan of gin martinis could intelligibly say, "Through gin alone is there a Martini." This wouldn't necessarily need to signal fondness for the Winston Churchill vermouth-free Martini. Instead, it can pick out *one salient element* against a background of other possibilities. I am in essence saying, as I believe is true, "The vodka martini is an aberration, a contradiction in terms. Though gin alone (*as opposed* to vodka, or rum or whatever) can a martini be made.) If the "erst" is, however, understood as "first" or "primally," also possible translations for it, then it is more clearly noting an essential ingredient, or perhaps even just a background condition, for something being a value is that it be esteemed. It is not saying that being a value is *simply* a matter of this.

communities. "A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power" (TSZ, I, ibid.). It could be that Nietzsche thinks there is *nothing beyond* this contingent esteeming by particular people. But nothing in the passage speaks strongly in favor of this, and certainly nothing renders this skeptical reading more plausible than the alternative I am suggesting. It is just not clear that Nietzsche is addressing meta-axiological issues in this passage at all.

But, once again, let us suppose for the sake of argument that Nietzsche is meaning to offer a meta-axiological theory here. The text, again, is compatible with the two non-projectivist lines (the Euthyphro-inspired and secondary qualities views) that I just sketched, as well as with views, such as that recently defended by Joseph Raz, on which values are in a different way dependent on human valuers. According to Raz, values require valuers and a web of social practices to sustain them, and furthermore, new values, with genuine axiological standing, can rightfully be said to be created by human beings.[34] Though being regarded as valuable is not a sufficient condition for being valuable, it is a necessary one. Even if these views are not philosophically satisfying, all are intelligible positions. Nietzsche does not explicitly opt for any views of this sort, but neither does he explicitly opt for a sort of eliminativism regarding the possibility of genuine values, including non-moral values. It is just not apparent whether Nietzsche is even talking about meta-axiology in these passages. And even if he were, it is not clear what he takes to follow from his metaphysics of value about the possibility of some values having standing.

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[34] Raz (2003).

VI. Perspectival Value

In order to lend more precision to the way in which Nietzsche thinks of values as having objective standing, I'd now like to turn to consider Bernard Reginster's important recent interpretation. Reginster's interpretation is more nuanced than others in the sort of objectivity about the standing of values that it sees Nietzsche as rejecting. Reginster, it seems to me, is right to think that Nietzsche, throughout his career, rejects a Platonic metaphysics of value. Reginster goes further and shows that Nietzsche also rejects a more contructivist brand of Kantianism that would see values as grounded in facts about what we rationally could will.[35] Reginster convincingly draws on Schopenhauer's criticisms of Kant's practical philosophy, as well as on Nietzsche's notion of perspectivism, to make his exegetical case. According to Reginster, Nietzsche rejects (in Reginster's terms) the sort of "normative objectivism" present in Plato and Kant and opts for a form of "normative subjectivism" instead.[36]

What is it that Reginster means by values being "objective" (or, by contrast "subjective") here? Reginster draws the line between the objective and the subjective in a way parallel to the debate about external reasons and internal reasons from contemporary meta-ethics. According to Reginster's "normative subjectivism," something is valuable for me only if it is anchored in my subjective motivational set. Taking the Nietzschean notion of a perspective to be akin to a subjective motivational set, Reginster argues that in order for something to be a value *for me*, it has to be a value anchored in my own contingent evaluative perspective. The problem with

[35] Whether such a form of constructivism is Kant's own metaethical view is another, more contentious matter that I will not consider here.

[36] Reginster (2006), p. 58.

forms of "normative objectivism"–Platonism and the constructivist brand of Kantianism–is, according to Reginster's reconstruction of Nietzsche, that they neglect this and try to ground what is valuable for me–and indeed for everyone–in facts about what is non-perspectivally valuable, in virtue of the metaphysically objective Form of the Good or facts about what any person (not me with my contingent desires in particular) rationally must will.

This is an intriguing suggestion. But my resistance to this reading comes down to how we are to construe the meta-axiological import of Nietzsche's perspectivism. Perspectivism, on a more anthropological and less meta-axiological construal than Reginster's, might instead tell us that what people *take as valuable* depends on their perspective, in the sense that it depends on how their social situation and their psychological needs color their view of the world. If my perspective is one of the Christian, I will, Nietzsche thinks, probably take a life of devoted service to God and of self-abasement to be the most valuable life for me. Because my entrenched commitments influence my way of looking at things, certain things will show up as valuable to me. This anthropological construal would seem to make quite good sense of the visual element of Nietzsche's metaphor of a perspective. It is, in the first instance, a claim about how things look to people. It is a considerable step, however, to saying that a perspective, in a more idealist fashion, also influences how things are. For does my seeing things in this way–that is, from this perspective–*make it so*? Does this make things valuable for me?

There is a weaker and a stronger way for a perspective to play a role in determining whether something is valuable for a given person. The weaker version Nietzsche may well accept, given what might be described as his anti-Procrusteanism: There is no single way of life that is best for everyone. A few are cut out to be free spirits, most to be slaves "in some sense or

other" (BGE, 257). What way of life is best for you, according to Nietzsche, depends on features of you, including your pre-existing and maybe intractable evaluative perspective. Thus, if you have a given set of features, including a given evaluative perspective, then the best sort of life (or range of lives, maybe) for you is such-and-such. But on the stronger reading of how a perspective makes it the case that something is valuable, the claim would be that the truth of that conditional itself–and, even more extremely, the truth of all value claims (for you)–is dependent on your perspective: That your perspective has it that a given life is the best life for you *makes it the case*, in this stronger way, that it is. That your perspective has it that such-and-such is valuable makes it the case that it is (for you). Some with certain Humean commitments will find this point congenial on independent philosophical grounds, but the question is whether it can be squared with Nietzsche's texts. I have my doubts, because it becomes very difficult to reconcile with his idea that an evaluative perspective might *itself* be radically faulty.

Some perspectives are jaundiced by "life-negating" ideology. They may permit the agents who hold them to eke out meager survival. But it doesn't mean that these are the *accurate* evaluative perspectives, in the sense that they are adequate to the evaluative truths. In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche is very clear that perspectives can be inadequate to the facts:

> Against this theologians' instinct I wage war: I have found its traces everywhere. Whoever has theologians' blood in his veins, sees all things in a distorted and dishonest perspective to begin with. The pathos which develops out of this condition calls itself *faith*: closing one's eyes to oneself once and for all, lest one suffer the sight of incurable falsehood. This erroneous [*fehlerhaften*] perspective on all things is elevated into a

> morality, a virtue, a holiness; the good conscience is tied to faulty vision; and no *other* perspective is conceded any further value once one's own has been made sacrosanct with the names of "God," "redemption," and "eternity" [...] Whatever a theologian feels to be true *must* be false: this is almost a criterion of truth. His most basic instinct of self-preservation forbids him to respect reality at any point or even to let it get a word in. Wherever the theologians' instinct extends, *value judgments* have been stood on their heads and the concepts of "true" and "false" are of necessity reversed: whatever is most harmful to life is called "true"; whatever elevates it, enhances, affirms, justifies it, and makes it triumphant, is called "false." (A, 9).

If Nietzsche thought perspectives were akin to subjective motivational sets, then there would be no way for *they themselves* to be false. But that is just what he appears to think in this passage.

Perhaps one can make a better case for this strong reading of the relation between perspectives and values based on the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here Nietzsche sets up perspectivism as an alternative to Platonism about value, lambasting Plato's "invention" of "the pure spirit [*reinen Geiste*] and the good in itself" [*Guten an sich*]. This Platonic way of looking at things, Nietzsche says, amounts to "standing truth on her head and denying [*verleugnen*] *perspective*, the basic condition of all life." One might take this as grist for the mill and think that Nietzsche is denying the possibility that anything is valuable, except relative to the contingent evaluative perspective of a given person. But there is considerable space between denying that Platonic picture and moving to a view on which our motivational sets make it the case that things are valuable for us. We canvassed in Section V some ways in which Nietzsche might be

read as denying the complete metaphysical objectivity of genuine values, by insisting there is some important human contribution (Euthypro-style response dependence, a secondary qualities view, a social dependence view, etc.). The Platonic form of the good would be denying that there is *any* human contribution like this, and this may well be what Nietzsche is meaning to deny in criticizing Plato's denial of perspective.

I think there is an even more modest reading still. The dogmatist's error is, in Kaufmann's translation, to "deny" [*verleugnen*] perspective. But what does this mean? We could think of it as a philosophical thesis: namely, the denial that the good has any perspectival element. That was the view I just considered. But *verleugnen* can also mean "to disown" or "to repudiate." This is to refuse to be associated with something, to think it is beneath one's dignity or to sully one's honor to do so. When the conservative parents "disown" or "repudiate" their lesbian daughter, they are rejecting her, not giving up belief in her very existence. On my preferred reading, the dogmatist is not only denying perspective, in the sense of holding an aperspectival theory of the good, which Plato certainly does, but also *disowning* or *repudiating* perspectives as important objects of philosophical study.

Nietzsche sets his own way of philosophizing up as an alternative to the dogmatist's. Whereas the dogmatist's only concern is investigating the truth about the right values and about other enduring philosophical questions, Nietzsche is a perspectivist because he is *also* interested in investigating people's *perspectives* on these questions, including the question of what is valuable. This, I think, is one of the reasons Nietzsche's philosophy is so difficult to assimilate into the philosophical tradition. Most philosophers are interested just in the truth about metaphysics, epistemology, morality, and so on. Nietzsche is unusual in being just as interested

in why people believe what they do about these subjects–in particular what physiological, psychological, historical, and social factors incline them to hold the views that they do.

The trouble with dogmatic philosophizing, exemplified in Plato most especially, is its single-minded obsession with the enduring truths about what is really the case. These are thought the only truths worth philosophy's attention. It repudiates, as unworthy of truly philosophical inquiry, this whole other range of interesting truths about *why* people come to believe what they do on these issues. Nietzsche, on the contrary, thinks that these perspectives are a fertile area of inquiry. Consider Part I of *Beyond Good and Evil*, coming right on the heels of his complaint that Plato has "denied" or "disowned" perspective. Nietzsche spends much of this section, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," discussing why past philosophers have been tempted by the views they have. So too in Parts III and V, where his concerns are with the human phenomena of religion and morality respectively, recurring themes for him before and after *Beyond Good and Evil.* His concern, when it comes to these phenomena, is just as much with why people hold these views than with giving arguments for what the right views in the field are.

But to treat the issue of Nietzsche's perspectivism in detail is far beyond my scope here. I have just meant to sketch an alternative interpretative possibility. On my proposed reading, Nietzsche can be understood as getting at something much less idealistic with his perspectivism than interpreters have often held. In any event, given that the understanding of perspectives as subjective motivational sets is incompatible with what Nietzsche says in *The Antichrist* and its not necessitated by what he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, we should construe perspectivism, I suggest, as a minimal thesis about what value *judgments* an agent's psychological and social

condition will incline him to make. If we accept this less meta-axiologically ambitious understanding of perspectivism, then we can reject Platonism about value and the Kantian rationalist-constructivist thesis without needing to go so far as to accept what Reginster calls "normative subjectivism" as Nietzsche's view about the standing of values. We can think that while there are objective (in some sense) facts about value, these needn't be anchored in Platonic truths, nor need they be constructed out of the deliverances of practical reason. They might, however, be objective in the sense that they needn't be dependent on being rooted in a person's subjective motivational set in order to have the evaluative standing for that person that they do.[37]

VII. Conclusion

The question typically arises for those working on Nietzsche's value theory about what his views on issues of meta-ethics and meta-axiology were. The answer, I have tried to show, is that his thoughts on these topics do not amount to a clear position. While one can certainly seek to develop a meta-axiology *in a Nietzschean spirit*, where the goal is simply to come up with something philosophically respectable that is not incompatible with what Nietzsche says and is inspired to some degree by what he does say, my project here is more historical and exegetical in character. If we stick to what Nietzsche *himself* actually says about the standing of values, we see

[37] The idea that values must be anchored in one's subjective motivational set in order to have the privilege that they do–an idea on which Reginster puts a great deal of weight–depends, it seems to me, on the overly *practical* way of conceiving of all values that I was warning against before. Despite rejecting Kantianism, Reginster seems to accept the focus on the *deliberative standpoint* as the one from which all evaluative questions are framed. Yet can't there just be a question about what is valuable and whether some judgments of value are more accurate than others? Need all these questions be translated into questions about what is to be done by given agents and whether individual agents could be motivated to do those things? Just what import is the motivational claim supposed to be have, if we construe the structure of values in less practical terms, more along the lines of aesthetic evaluation than along the lines of practical reasons for action?

that it is quite sketchy and does not strongly support the sorts of complex positions that have been attributed to him. The evidence is just too thin. In contrast to his provocative perfectionism and to his groundbreaking anthropology of morality and critique of the same, topics on which what Nietzsche has to say is vastly more developed, his meta-axiology is just not where his interests or his strengths as a philosopher lie. I have thus worked in this chapter toward a modest conclusion: Given that his expressed views do not foreclose the possibility that he grants evaluative standing to the perfectionistic values he champions, we should at least leave open this possibility. The Nietzsche that so many philosophers think they know–the Nietzsche who is alleged to be skeptical that there are any real values–is just not the philosopher who confronts us when we look carefully at his texts.

One of the major obstacles thus far to seeing Nietzsche as a value realist (by that I just mean someone who thinks that there really are values with evaluative standing) is that it has been argued that *if* he is realist about value, then he must be read as trying to ground all value in the will to power. And given that the latter project, judging from the works he chose to publish, is not clearly Nietzsche's and is of dubious philosophical merits on its own terms, Nietzsche, this argument goes, must not be read as accepting realism about value.[38] But that is a particularly implausible variant of value realism both textually and philosophically. By showing that Nietzsche shouldn't be attributed such a strongly reductionist view about what features of the world ground value, one does not thereby foreclose the idea that he is realist of *some stripe* about value. The value theory suggested in the published works is more pluralistic in what it suggests

[38] Leiter (2000), p. 280.

as the bearers of value.[39] Here we move into the territory of issues that are no longer in Nietzsche's second-order meta-axiology, but in his first-order theory of what is valuable. Working that out is not the project of this chapter. But the point relevant for our discussion here is this: If Nietzsche is a realist about value, we do not need to see him as trying to reduce all values to exercises of the will to power, a risible idea he toys with only in notebook passages he never publishes.[40]

In the chapter to come, the final chapter, we will put meta-axiological issues aside and look to his own values. Though Nietzsche is critical of many existing values, Nietzsche has a conception of the good and of human flourishing. And unlike these rejected values, he takes his positive view to enshrine the right sort of ideals: creativity, beauty, accomplishment, boldness, and so on. In the chapter to follow, we shall explore his conception of human flourishing and the human good in greater detail. I shall question the prevalent reading that would have it that Nietzsche thinks of morality, of the sort considered in Chapters 4 and 5, as an ideology in the

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[39] Peter Railton (Forthcoming), has sketched such a pluralistic realist view in his "Nietzsche's Normative Theory? The Art and Skill of Living Well," Although I find many elements of Railton's case plausible, I do not think there is strong enough textual evidence to settle the question of whether Nietzsche is a naturalist (in the contemporary sense), even if he is a realist. Although Nietzsche throws around the term "natural" a great deal, we must be cautious with the categories of "naturalist" and "non-naturalist" in this context. Simply in speaking of the values he praises as "natural," Nietzsche is not clearly committing himself to a meta-axiological or metaphysical claim about what value itself is, as opposed simply to an extensional claim about what sorts of things are valuable. We should bear in mind that in stressing the "natural" character of values, Nietzsche is principally concerned to rebut the idea that value is anchored in the sorts of things that he regards as supernatural fictions–the Form of the Good or the Kantian metaphysical posits of practical reason–things redolent of the "'true world,'" in Nietzsche's derisive, inverted-commas use of that phrase (TI, "How the 'True' World Finally Became a Fable"). But does this anti-supernaturalism mean that Nietzsche is naturalist (in the contemporary sense) and *not* non-naturalist (in some more plausible, non-supernaturalist contemporary sense)? As with the semantic issues mentioned at the outset of this chapter, we do well to avoid these labels for Nietzsche. His texts, so far as I can tell, give no indication of his thoughts about whether value is *itself* a natural property or whether it might be a non-natural property that supervenes on natural properties. Those who take stances on these issues now have more than century of philosophy behind them, a century including Moore's "open question" argument among other things. When Nietzsche describes values as part of the natural world, it is without having the benefit of being able to think about these sorts of objections. He might well have dismissed Moore's argument as bogus or unconvincing; he might well have been moved by it. But our speculation on this score is largely idle.

[40] Cf., WP, 55 [KSA, 13:422-27]; WP, 674 [KSA, 13:39-40].

interests of the weak. Whatever comforting illusions it affords and meretricious benefits it brings, morality, on my reading of Nietzsche, is an ideology that valorizes forms of life that are actually in the interest of no one. On Nietzsche's strenuously Romantic conception of the good life, the best life is the heroic one where a person struggles, suffers, and accomplishes something great. Despite what many readers of Nietzsche have assumed, this is Nietzsche's ideal of life for "the strong" *and* for "the weak." The best sort of life is one in which a person participates in a flourishing culture—even just by making a lowly contribution. For this is what truly ennobles a person and, according to Nietzsche, grants his or her life its highest worth and dignity. Although Nietzsche is hostile to the idea of innate human dignity and its egalitarian trappings enshrined in Christianity and Kantianism, he offers his own revisionary conception of human dignity—a worth merited by what one is able to accomplish and thus possessed in radically different degrees by different people.

Chapter 7:
"Consecration to Culture:"
On Slavery and Human Dignity

"There are some who threw away their last worth [*Werth*]
when they threw away their servitude [*Dienstbarkeit*]."
–*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I, "On the Way of the Creator."

I. Introduction

In the infamous opening sections from Part IX of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche celebrates a strident kind of elitism and countenances, in however attenuated a form, the institution of slavery. "Every enhancement of the type 'man,'" he writes, "has so far been the work of an aristocratic society–and it will be so again and again–a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and difference in worth [*Werthverschiedenheit*] between man and man, and that needs slavery [*Sklaverei*] in some sense or other" (257). In the section that follows, Nietzsche describes a "good and healthy aristocracy" as "accept[ing] with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake* [um ihretwillen], must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves [*Sklaven*], to instruments [*Werkzeugen*]" (258). From these passages taken in isolation, an unsavory picture can emerge of Nietzsche as a defender, indeed a champion, of exploitation of the worst sort: Nietzsche appears to praise a world in which a small elite enhances itself through the subjugation of the rest of mankind, who bear this yoke of servitude and get nothing in return.

The assumption undergirding this reading is a natural one: namely, that whatever benefits it may bring to an elite, whatever cultural achievements it may make possible, slavery is not in the interest of the slaves themselves. But it is not, as I shall argue here, Nietzsche's own

way of looking at things. Far from thinking it is contrary to the interests of "the masses" that they be subjugated, Nietzsche argues that ironically it is *in being* "reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments" (BGE, 258) that most people–those not part of the tiny aristocracy of Nietzschean great individuals–can come to live what Nietzsche regards as the most flourishing life for them. As I hope to make clear in what follows, the idea of "slavery in some sense or other" (BGE, 257) that Nietzsche envisages is far more subtle than one might at first suppose from the connotations of this deliberately shocking word he chooses. In this paper I will spell out what conception of a person's flourishing Nietzsche is working with, what sense of "slavery" he has in mind, and why he thinks this form of "slavery" is the best sort of life for all but a few exceptional great individuals. My aim here is primarily to explicate Nietzsche's views, not to evaluate them. But I do hope to suggest that Nietzsche's remarks about slavery are less odious than they can sometimes seem, even if they ultimately leave us unsettled.

II. Morality and "the Slave Revolt"

In his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche offers a speculative story about the genesis of morality. According to Nietzsche's quasi-allegorical, quasi-historical narrative, morality comes into being at a particular time in history as the result of something he calls "the slave revolt" (GM, I:10). I have discussed this genealogy in Chapter 4 already. But, in short, most readers interpret the revolt that Nietzsche describes as a cunning ploy on the part of the weak and oppressed "slaves" themselves to topple "the nobles" from power–with the invention of

morality being the slaves' weapon of choice. I read Nietzsche's genealogical account differently.[1] The slaves, as I see it, are in fact the pawns of those Nietzsche calls "the priestly people," who foment this revolt by creating a new religion–Christianity–and a new system of values–morality–and foisting them on nobles and slaves alike, who in turn eventually come to organize their lives by these new ideals.[2]

Interpreters of Nietzsche who accept the former reading, and thus see the slave revolt as the strategic work of the slaves, often conclude that the morality system that thereby gets its start must be one that is in the interests of the slaves, since, on this reading, the slaves create morality with the instrumental aim of benefiting themselves and harming the nobles.[3] For interpreters who incline toward the latter reading, according to which these new values are a priestly creation, this assumption comes less naturally, since the demagogic priestly instigators might not have the slaves' best interests at heart. But it is important to note that whatever stance we take on the exegetical issue of what role the slaves in Nietzsche's story are supposed to play in inventing morality, it is an open question whether the values that get inaugurated are actually by Nietzsche's lights in the slaves' best interests. (For even if the slaves did invent these values, they might be mistaken about what is in their interests. And even if the priestly did invent these values for their own calculating purposes, the slaves might nonetheless be the fortunate beneficiaries.)

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[1] To forestall confusion on a point of terminology: Note that there are at least two different (albeit overlapping) senses in which Nietzsche uses the term "slave" and related words. One use of it, particularly in the plural, is as a label for a certain historical group of people ("the slaves") who are characters in the *Genealogy*. "Slave," in the second, broader sense, works to pick out a functional role in a culture that one can play, as I discuss in Section V of this paper. Typically, Nietzsche refers to the practice "slavery" rather than to the people when he has this second sense in mind. [Cf., BGE, 257]). Someone can be a slave in the first sense without being enslaved in the second sense and *vice versa*. The extension of the second sense is far more expansive: it will include some of the slaves in the first sense, but also many others in addition.

[2] Others who read Nietzsche in this way include Reginster (1997) and Wallace (2007).

[3] e.g., Leiter (2002), p. 105-12; Bittner (1994).

Nietzsche doubtless gives us reason to think that morality, on *some* level, is beneficial for the slaves and for those he calls "the weak" more generally.[4] In helping to turn the aggressions of the nobles inward, this new morality system serves to protect the weak from direct physical harms. In valorizing the character traits of the weak and demonizing those of the strong, it affords the weak what R. Jay Wallace has aptly called a "vindicatory" self-conception.[5] In establishing the ascetic ideal, it gives the weak a reason, however dismal, to go on living. But should we infer from these apparent benefits that Nietzsche takes morality to be an ideology in the best interests of the weak.[6]

III. Objective Interests, Flourishing, and False Consciousness

To answer the above question, we must ask what it is for a value system, and in particular, a way of life it recommends, to be in someone's interest. There is one sense of the term "interest" in common and in academic parlance alike, according to which what is in one's interest is getting what one happens to want. If one wants to lead a life free from all struggle and toil and to spend one's days loafing around in a pleasurably beery haze, then that is in one's interest. Interest, glossed in this way, is simply a function of one's contingent desires. This is *not* the sense of the

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[4] The slaves who are characters in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* are one important particular historical example of his more general category of "the weak." This division of the strong [forms of *stark*] and the weak [forms of *schwach*] is one of Nietzsche's most basic ways of classifying people (Cf., GM, I:13). Unfortunately, Nietzsche is never clear about just what strength and weakness, in the relevant senses, are supposed to consist in. It is at least clear that Nietzsche does not mean by "strength" simply brute physical prowess, nor by "weakness" does he necessarily mean its lack. For strength of spirit or mind [*Geist*], according to Nietzsche, is just as, if not more important. (Cf., BGE, 39; EH, "Preface," 3). About Nietzschean strength, one can say little that is informative: It is a package of capabilities (both physical and mental), special talents and skills, along with dispositions reliably to behave in certain ways (for example, ways that manifest one's strength in deeds (GM, I:13)).

[5] Wallace (2007) does not come down decisively one way or another on whether this vindicatory self-conception is in the best interest of the slaves or whether the slaves simply *think* that it is in their interest.

[6] Leiter (2002), for example, attributes to Nietzsche the view that "moral values are, in fact, *in the interest* of certain types of people, namely the lower men," p. 124. Cf. also, p. 52-3.

term "interest" I am using when I ask what, on Nietzsche's view, is in the interests of a given set of people. I have in mind what in colloquial terms is instead the more paternalistic, "Father-Knows-Best" sense of "interests," where the word "interest" often gets prefaced by "best." (Father *knows* what is in your "best interest" even when you yourself do not.) In more technical terms, this often goes by the name of "objective interest." What is in one's interest, in this sense, is what is actually beneficial for one's flourishing.[7] It is "objective" because (in an important sense) it is independent both of what one happens to want and of what one happens to believe about what is in one's interest. The point of describing these interests as "objective" is not to suggest their complete mind-independence, but simply to signal that they are a subject about which one could sometimes have false beliefs or in connection with which one could have inappropriate desires.[8] Some people believe things to be good for them that are not and desire things that are not really good for them. We will shortly be considering what Nietzsche takes human flourishing to consist in, but it is important to bear in mind that "interest," in the specific sense

[7] For a similar sense of "objective interests" see Railton (1986a) and (1986b). This is also how Leiter (2002) in his work on Nietzsche uses the term, p. 109.

[8] They are "in an important sense" independent of beliefs and desires because there is an obvious way in which objective interests should not be cast as wholly belief and desire independent: That one happens to believe *p* as opposed to *q*, or to want *r* as opposed to *s*, will often affect what is in one's objective interests. The important point for the defender of objective interests is that the relevant conditionals are true: "If you believe *p*, then *a* is in your interest" is true, and "If you want *r*, then *b* is in your interest" is true, regardless of what you happen to believe about the truth of those conditionals or to desire in the face of them–or, for that matter, in ignorance of them. (For those with certain Humean commitments, such as Railton, the account of objective interests would need to be more complicated still, grounded as it would need to be in certain idealized desiderative attitudes. But, so far as I can tell, there is not a strong textual case to be made that Nietzsche shares these Humean commitments himself.)

at issue in this paper, bears this intimate conceptual connection with the promotion of flourishing.[9]

Something can be in one's best interest in ways ranging from the more constitutive to the more instrumental.[10] Accomplishing an exalted goal, on many conceptions of human flourishing including Nietzsche's, is a paradigm case of something constitutively beneficial. It is itself one of the goods of a flourishing human life. Eating adequate nutrients is closer to the instrumental end of the spectrum. It makes possible the attainment of other goods that are themselves constitutive of the good life. Without consuming a certain amount of protein, one will simply not have the energy to undertake one's projects. While Nietzsche neither explicitly makes this distinction himself nor uses the term "interest" in this technical way, he nonetheless tries to work out what is in a person's interest in both the instrumental and the constitutive senses.[11]

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[9] Here "flourishing" is translating Nietzsche's "*Gedeihen*" (Cf., GM, "Preface," 3). "Flourishing," in particular its Aristotelian and Thomistic resonances, could be taken to suggest that Nietzsche is deriving a conception of human flourishing from a conception of what human beings fundamentally are, so that their flourishing amounts to action in accordance with their essence. For a reading in this essentialist vein, drawing especially on Nietzsche's notebooks, see Richardson (1996), Chs. 1 and 3. I am more reluctant to draw on this notebook material, as a matter of exegetical taste, and so, as I read Nietzsche, it is more controversial whether Nietzsche thinks humans (or any other entities) *have* an essence, and it is just as controversial whether he takes their good to consist in acting in accordance with their essence (assuming they have one). In any event, I cannot treat these issues adequately here. But in using the term "flourishing," I do not mean to be taking a stance one way or another regarding Nietzsche's view on this issue about human essence and the strong relation of the human good to it. I am simply using "flourishing," as I think Nietzsche at the very least uses it, to describe human lives that are well-lived. Kaufmann renders this term "*Gedeihen*" as "prosperity" instead. This does not have the Aristotelian connotations, but it has an unfortunately Benjamin-Franklin-esque ring to it, with suggestions of worldly financial success.

[10] Leiter (2002), p. 106 uses the term "facilitates," which, to my ear, lends itself primarily to an instrumental reading. We should be careful not to assume that what is important to a person's flourishing is exhausted by what is *instrumentally* important.

[11] About what is more instrumentally in one's interest, Nietzsche, for example, writes: "I am much more interested in a question on which the 'salvation of humanity' depends far more than on any theologians' curio: the question of *nutrition*. For ordinary use, one may formulate it thus: 'how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength, of *virtù* in the Renaissance style, of moraline-free virtue?'" (EH, "Clever," 1). (See also WS, 6). About what is more constitutively in one's interest, he asks: "[H]ow can your life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars, and not for the good of the majority, that is to say those who, taken individually, are the least valuable exemplars" (UM, III:6).

This question of interests is pressing in the interpretation of Nietzsche, because he sees morality as extoling ways of life that are hostile to human flourishing. Along these lines, a prominent reading of Nietzsche would have it that the spiritual aristocracy of nascent great individuals is under the sway of a "false consciousness" about what is in their best interest.[12] They wrongly take the way of life that morality (in the pejorative sense) extols – that of, for example, comfort, safety, and "green-pasture happiness of the herd" (BGE, 44) – to be the flourishing life for them. This approach to Nietzsche, drawing on these notions of interests and false consciousness, is a promising one. But it should be pressed much further, I think. Instead of confining this false consciousness to the Nietzschean elite, we should, I will be arguing here, see the rest of mankind–"the weak"–as afflicted by it as well. For although it is right that the weak benefit from the morality system in several ways, on another, more important level Nietzsche sees them as its victims. Contrary to the illusions fostered by the priestly class on the one hand, and by Kant, along with Bentham and other more "secular" thinkers on the other, the flourishing life does not consist in the accumulation of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, or in pitying all that suffers, or in cultivating one's moral virtue, or in the worship of God, or in anything else that versions of morality laud above all else.[13] The "benefits" gained by the weak are meretricious when set against what Nietzsche regards as needed if they are to flourish: And that is to be "slaves"–in some attenuated sense, at least–as I shall make clear in what follows.

Marx famously claims that religion is "the opium of the people," and Nietzsche, though he would add morality along with Christianity into this intoxicating mix as well, is similar to

[12] Leiter, (2002), p. 176. Leiter draws on Peter Railton's work (1986a and 1986b) in clarifying the sense of objective interest he employs, p. 106-112.

[13] This is not to say that the flourishing life cannot involve any of those things. They simply, on Nietzsche's view, are not the key elements of the flourishing life, according to his strenuously heroic conception of the flourishing life as one in which one struggles and suffers in the pursuit of greatness.

Marx at least in the idea that the masses are beset by a form of false consciousness.[14] To be sure, the form this false consciousness takes is by Nietzsche's lights very different: Seduced by Christianity and the morality it spawns into accepting the delusion that they are atomic individuals of infinite worth, most people, Nietzsche thinks, shirk the role that would really lend their lives the highest significance they can have.[15] Whatever a person may regard as the best life for himself, and whatever we, with our contemporary liberal sensibilities, may regard as the best life for a person, it is the better *Nietzschean* life, provided one cannot be a great Nietzschean composer or philosopher, to be a slave building the pyramids, a medieval serf laboring on Chartes cathedral, or a peon sweeping Beethoven's floor than to be a comfortable, "free" person in the culturally decadent modern West.

Now Nietzsche, as many rightly observe, is adamant that there is not a single mode of life best for everyone.[16] But this can mislead interpreters into overstating the asymmetry between what constitutes the flourishing life for "the strong" (basically a small elite) and for "the

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[14] This famous remark about religion being the "opium of the people" is from Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: An Introduction." Especially given the hermeneutical apparatus that Leiter (2002) brings to bear (p. 176, 185)–one drawing on the notions of ideology and false consciousness, terms more familiar from Marxist thought, but highly illuminating for interpreting Nietzsche as well–we should be all the more suspicious about whether the majority of mankind, just as much as the elite, know what is in their best interest. The familiar lesson from Marx is that the systematic distortions of ideology can render opaque to one just what is in one's best interest.

[15] From the fact that they are under the sway of this false consciousness, one should not assume that Nietzsche thinks they must be freed from it and informed about what sort of life is best for them. Nietzsche, in general, is doubtful that it is always beneficial for one to believe what is true (Cf., BGE, 4). From the standpoint of leading a worthwhile life, while it is far from the ideal scenario, it may well be better for many to go on living as they do and not be aware of what lends their lives genuine significance. For if they falsely believe that the best life for them is one of devoted and obedient service to God, this may render them willing to fulfill the role that actually will endow their lives with significance. This is the (rather misleading) grain of truth to the idea that the ways of life praised by slave morality are in the best interest of the slaves. What is actually in their interest is not this way of life *per se*, but rather *the false belief* that this way of life is in their interest. And this false belief is valuable only because it is instrumentally beneficial in fostering the way of life that actually is in their interest.

[16] Nehamas (1988), p. 57; Geuss (1999), p. 173-4; Leiter, (2002), p. 112; Young (2010), p. 298.

weak" (the mass of mankind).[17] For the strong, the best life is thought to be one of creative struggle and suffering, one in which they expend themselves, maybe even sacrifice themselves, in the pursuit of something great. "I know of no better aim of life than that of perishing, *animae magnae prodigus*, in pursuit of the great and the impossible..." Nietzsche writes (UM, II:9). He lauds those who are inured to "difficulties, hardships, privation, even to life itself," those "prepared to sacrifice human beings for one's cause, not excluding oneself" (TI, "Skirmishes," 38). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche counsels those who would achieve greatness to "*live dangerously*!" "Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas!" (GS, 283). Yet for the weak, it is often thought, given their lack of wherewithal and creative potential, the best sort of life is one of simple pleasures and comforting illusions. But although there is a grain of truth to this way of reading Nietzsche, as will become clear in what follows, this also, as I see it, amounts to a serious misunderstanding of his views. Nietzsche certainly thinks that the weak *do* seek comfortable, safe lives–a choice rendered vivid in Nietzsche's depiction of the "last man" in the Prologue to *Zarathustra*. But that is a far cry from thinking that the *best life for them* is of this sort. On the contrary, Nietzsche thinks that their highest calling is a strenuous one that they will try to avoid. The best life is one of participation in, or in the service of, the cultural sphere, whether it be through promoting the lives of a few great individuals or in aiding the flourishing of the cultural whole.[18] The best life for a weak

[17] For doubts about whether Nietzsche relativizes his conception of human flourishing to different "types" of people, as Leiter (2002), p. 124 proposes, see Reginster (2003). Nietzsche, as Reginster notes, is apparently interested in what is best for "the type man" (GM, "Preface," 6), not in the differential interests of various *types* of men.

[18] We must be cautious in interpreting what, for lack of a better word, might be thought of as Nietzsche's *ontology* of culture. Culture is not something wholly external to the average person, as, say an aggregation of symphonies and paintings or the pantheon of the rarified few who produce them. The idea that cultural goods are something to be "maximized" ((Rawls (1971), §50 and Hurka (2007)) has an economicist connotation that is alien to the spirit of Nietzsche's view. It is not as if the world would be five hundred times better if only we had five hundred more great composers or five hundred more great symphonies. Culture is an entire form of life, a collective social achievement in which, ideally, all can participate and through which a person comes to flourish.

person is in this respect not so different from the best life for a strong person. *Both* are called to a higher form of life.

Talents of course vary widely, and, accordingly, what one can sensibly be expected to contribute to the perfectionistic enterprise of culture varies widely as well. Most, on Nietzsche's view, will be incapable of writing masterful string trios. In this belief, Nietzsche is deeply elitist. But nonetheless he also thinks a higher form of life *is* open to the ordinary person, and that is one in which they aid in the flourishing of intellectual and artistic excellence–whether lugging the stones to build the cathedral or even more indirectly, creating the material and (just as importantly) the spiritual conditions that permit a leisured class the chance to participate more directly in endeavors of the spirit. This is because human lives, Nietzsche thinks, have their highest worth and dignity when they are "consecrat[ed] to culture" (UM, III:6)–when they are lived, indeed even sacrificed, in its service.[19] It is not that they are called to *tender their own flourishing* on the altar of culture. It is rather that *in devoting their lives to the collective project of culture, they truly come to flourish*. Nietzsche's most extended discussion of this topic comes in the *Untimely Meditations*, but the theme is one that had been percolating since his early essay "The Greek State," and it is one we continue to see reverberate all the way through to his final works of 1888. In the section to follow, I will explain the unusual notions of human worth and dignity that Nietzsche relies upon in spelling out the sort of flourishing life he takes it to be in a person's best interest to lead.

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[19]Geuss (2008) notes that even after giving up faith in God and morality, Nietzsche retained his faith in culture. Geuss, however, suggests that this is a failing on his part: "Nietzsche war weder gottgläubig noch moralgläubig, aber er zeigte gelegentlich die Tendenz, naiv-kultur-gläubig zu sein," p. 38. [Nietzsche was a believer neither in God nor in morality, but he sometimes showed the tendency to be a naive believer in culture.]

IV. Human Worth and Dignity

To modern sensibilities, one of Nietzsche's most unsettling claims is to raise doubts about whether human beings all have equal and innate worth and dignity–as children of God, ensouled beings, rational agents or anything else.[20] This account about the equal worth of all people is particularly appealing to the lowliest, he thinks. Among other reasons, this is why the Christian concept of the soul, as something to underwrite this worth, is so tantalizing for them to accept. As Nietzsche caustically puts in *The Antichrist*:

> That everyone as an "immortal soul" has equal rank with everyone else, that in the totality of living beings the "salvation" of *every* single individual may claim eternal significance, that little gnats and three-quarter-madmen may have the conceit that the laws of nature are constantly broken for their sakes–such an intensification of every kind of selfishness into the infinite, into the *impertinent*, cannot be branded with too much contempt. And yet Christianity owes its triumph to this miserable flattery of personal vanity: it was precisely all the failures, all the rebellious-minded, all the less favored, the whole scum and refuse of humanity who were thus won over to it. The "salvation of the soul"–in plain language: "the world revolves around *me*" (A, 43).

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[20] As Leiter (2002) notes: "The egalitarian premise of all contemporary moral and political theory — the premise, in one form or another, of the equal worth or dignity of each person — is simply absent in Nietzsche's work," p. 290. Ansell-Pearson (1994), in a similar spirit, writes, "Unlike liberalism, Nietzsche does not hold that the individual person is inviolable and that human life is sacrosanct," p. 11. In BGE 257, Nietzsche says that it is *belief* in an order of rank and differences in value between man and man that characterizes aristocratic society. This formulation is neutral on whether such a belief is accurate (even if socially beneficial). Elsewhere, however, he is more explicit in the idea that social stratification can be a "sanction of a *natural order.*" (A, 57). In the very same passage, however, he writes: "When the exceptional human being treats the mediocre human being more tenderly than himself and his peers, this is not mere politeness of the heart–it is simply his duty" (A, 57). Obligations to others thus do not seem to presuppose all people being of equal worth.

Yet we should not allow Nietzsche's apparent doubts about *equal* and *innate* human worth to mislead us into thinking that Nietzsche rejects the notions of worth (and the dignity it underpins) entirely as a status potentially open to everyone. Although Nietzsche's conception of human worth and dignity is alien to more traditional Christian and Kantian conceptions of these terms, the idea of human worth and dignity, as the grounds on which a person merits respect, plays a central role in his value theory.[21] The most basic difference between Nietzschean worth and dignity on the one hand and Christian and Kantian worth and dignity on the other is that Christian and Kantian worth and dignity is something humans have equally and innately. Nietzschean worth and dignity, by contrast, is inegalitarian and achieved: Humans do not have it equally; and they must earn it, and earn the respect it merits, by what they do.

It will be helpful to begin by discussing the conception of dignity at issue in the Judeo-Christian moral tradition against which Nietzsche is reacting. The Christian understanding of dignity is codified in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, though similar views are shared in the Protestant denominations as well: "The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God."[22] "The divine image is present in every man."[23] "Endowed with 'a spiritual and immortal' soul, the human person is 'the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.'"[24] In what respect are we all similar to God? The most

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[21] I have so far been using the terms "worth" [*Wert(h)*] and "dignity" [*Würde*] in tandem. (As we shall see in Sections VI and VII of this paper Nietzsche uses both terms himself.) In German, they are etymologically related. How are they conceptually related? "Dignity," in a basic definition, is the state of being worthy of honor or respect. One would thus seem to have dignity *because* one has worth. In turn, one has this worth (or value) in virtue of certain features one has. Just what those features are, whether they are innate or earned, natural or non-natural, whether all humans have them in equal degrees, what moral demands follow from the possession of such features, and so on, are all open questions, on which Christians, Kantians, Nietzscheans, and others can disagree. In what follows, I will be using both the terms "dignity" and "worth," but it is important to bear in mind this direction of dependence.

[22] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1700

[23] *Catechism*, §1702.

[24] *Catechism*, §1703.

important, according to several branches of this tradition, is that we have freedom of some sort.[25]

This emphasis on freedom or autonomy as the ground of dignity continues into the Enlightenment, where one finds in Kant a restatement of these same basic ideas. Although Kant's own moral philosophy is still very much bound up with a Christian picture of God, the immortality of the soul, and free will as the metaphysical posits of practical reason, it is also distinctively modern in claiming that we are the self-legislators of the moral law that we obey. Kantian dignity consists in this capacity to exercise rational autonomy–in particular to prescribe laws for ourselves and to make those laws the maxims on which we act.[26] In virtue of having this capacity, a person has claims on you to treat her as an end-in-herself. Whatever beneficial consequences it may have, it is wrong to do something if doing so would violate a person's dignity. We cannot, to use a common contemporary example, harvest and redistribute her organs, even if it would have the benefit of saving many more lives. To do so is to treat her as a mere means and not as a creature of inviolable worth. Even among those who would not describe themselves as Christians or as Kantians, this conception of human dignity continues to exert a powerful influence on the modern moral imagination.[27]

If we simplify things considerably, we might see the Christian and Kantian conception of human worth and dignity prominent in the moral tradition as having these very general features. It is:

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[25] "Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with a free will and is therefore master over his acts," from St. Irenaeus' tract *Adversus Haereses*, quoted in *Catechism*, §1730.

[26] *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:439-440.

[27] See, for example, George Kateb, *Human Dignity*, (Harvard, 2010), p. 29-35.

1) Innate, or else tied to the possession of features or capacities that virtually all humans possess or will possess;[28]

2) Thus, independent of contingent external circumstance and accomplishment;[29]

3) Had in equal degree by humans of vastly different abilities;[30]

4) Grounded in non-natural (i.e.: supernatural) features that humans allegedly have;[31]

5) A strong constraint on whether a person can be used as a mere means;[32]

6) Intimately connected with autonomy.

7) Of greater importance than the accumulation of pleasure or the satisfaction of desires;[33]

8) The proper grounds on which one is worthy of respect.[34]

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[28] In the Christian tradition, the possession of a soul and the fact of being made in the likeness of God are what ground this dignity. (*Catechism*, §1700-1703). According to Kant in the *Groundwork*, the important thing is rational autonomy: "*Autonomy* is thus the ground of the dignity [*Würde*] of the human and of every rational nature," Ak. 4:436. See also Ak. 4:439.

[29] There is a perfectionistic strand in Kant's moral philosophy, having some affinities with Nietzsche's, according to which one has a duty to perfect one's natural talents. See *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:423. See also *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:386-94. On the "new circle of duties" relating to self-perfection, see UM, III:5. Cf. also BGE, 188, where Nietzsche makes clear that the imperative exhortation to make something of ourselves is not categorical in form. The key difference between Nietzsche and Kant is that according to Kant there is the safety net of dignity that everyone has equally in virtue of having the capacity for rational agency. Nietzsche, as I read him, calls into question whether *simply having this bare capacity* actually grants one dignity–that is, makes one truly worthy of the respect of others.

[30] For further discussion of why Kant must deny that dignity comes in degrees, see Wood (1999), p. 121.

[31] Kant's noumenally free self and the Christian soul are examples of such non-natural features. Of course, one could develop an account in a Kantian spirit that divested Kant's view of metaphysical baggage and grounded a person's dignity in wholly natural traits, for example the capacity for rational agency understood as a naturalistic feature of human animals. What is of relevance to this paper, however, is the historical Kant, *as Nietzsche understands him*, and that is as someone committed to a supernaturalist metaphysics underwriting his moral philosophy (see, for example, A, 10). Nietzsche, in contrast to Kant, stresses that humans are continuous with the rest of nature (BGE, 230). In noting this, however, I do not mean to prejudge the issue of whether Nietzsche is a naturalist or a non-naturalist in the *contemporary senses* of those terms. For competing views on this question, see Leiter (2002) and Pippin (2010) respectively.

[32] *Catechism*, §2270; Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429.

[33] In Kant's famous formulation: "*Act so that you use humanity* [Menschlichkeit], *as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means.*" *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429. This stricture against transgressing dignity is incumbent on you, even it deprives you of what would give you most pleasure and even if it is not what you want to do.

[34] *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6: 434-35. For Kant, "*dignity* (an absolute inner worth) [is that] by which [one] exacts *respect* for himself from all other rational beings in the world."

Nietzsche is doubtful that people have any such property that makes them *inherently* worthy of the respect of others.[35] Nietzsche regards it as an unfortunate cheapening of dignity that the standards are lowered so that every person is easily able to meet them in this way, with absolutely no effort on his or her part whatsoever. As he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "whatever can be common [*gemein*] always has little value" (43). In order to be something that *all* people have in common (in the sense of "shared") and have in equal degree, it is itself going to need to be common (in the sense of something that even the most "common," "base" people can have).

Yet rather than consigning the notions of worth and dignity to the dustbin of moral and theological error, Nietzsche, as I read him, presents an alternative. He proposes that accomplishment is the real ground of dignity–and thus the basis on which people properly merit respect. Dignity is something we can gain or lose based on how we lead our lives and on what fate befalls us.[36] Nietzsche, as we shall see, thus conceives of human worth and dignity in a drastically different way, agreeing only with the last two characteristics–namely, that achieving or maintaining it is of the utmost importance for a human life to be well-lived and that it is the grounds on which we are worthy of respect. On Nietzsche's view, human worth and dignity are:

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[35] In Kantian moral theory, dignity serves a key role in grounding the obligations we have to others. Nietzsche, for his part, wants to detach normative claims from the grounding they have thus far had (presumably including this Kantian grounding as well). After claiming in *Daybreak* that he is a denier of morality, he goes on to add, "It goes without saying that I do not deny – unless I am a fool – that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged–but I think the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *on other grounds than hitherto*" (D, 103).

[36] While Nietzsche's conception of human worth and dignity is not the same as the Homeric ideals of τιμή (honor) and κλέος (glory, renown), particularly in that Nietzsche's lacks a strongly familial or heritable flavor and is open to a wider range of people, it is, I suspect, strongly influenced by those classical notions, as well as by the Latin ideal of "*dignitas*," which means "worth, worthiness, merit," particularly in the sense of some prestige or status achieved. For a characteristic use of "*dignitas*," see Cicero, *De re publica*, Book I, 43, where in proto-Nietzschean fashion, Cicero laments that democracy does away with gradations of dignity.

1') Not innate, but achieved;

2') Thus, tied to contingent external circumstance and accomplishment;

3') Had in differing degrees by different people;

4') Grounded in natural traits and deeds of human beings;

5') Gained (in the case of most people) precisely through being treated as a means;

6') Not necessarily connected with autonomy;

7) Of greater importance than the accumulation of pleasure or the satisfaction of desires;

8) The proper grounds on which one is worthy of respect.

In the sections to follow, we will trace the textual underpinnings of these ideas in Nietzsche's work. For now, these enumerated claims are a promissory note for what is to come. Before we move on, however, it will be helpful now to tie together a few terms that have thus far been in play. The truly flourishing life–and thus, the life that is in one's best interest–is for Nietzsche the life of worth and dignity *in their Nietzschean senses*. It is the life in which one has dignity–one merits respect–because of one's human worth. And this comes through achievement and is not an innate endowment. We see the germ of these ideas as early as Nietzsche's 1870s essay "The Greek State." He develops them further in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and they persist into his later writings as well. In the section to follow, I will spell out Nietzsche's views in greater detail and explain why he thinks that the enslavement of the weak, rather than being incompatible with their Nietzschean dignity, can in fact be the way in which that dignity is achieved.

V. Nietzsche on "slavery in some sense or other" (BGE, 257)

One recurring theme in Nietzsche's corpus of work is that a flourishing culture of human excellence requires an underclass to render its achievements possible; there must be "slavery in some sense or other" (BGE, 257). Although this aspect of Nietzsche's thinking remains constant from his early essays (Cf., "The Greek State") to his final works of 1888 (Cf., A, 57), Nietzsche's attitude toward this "slavery in some sense or other" changes.

First, however, a word about the term "slavery" [*Sklaverei*]: In using the extraordinarily provocative term "slavery," Nietzsche is, among other things, seeking to remind his readers about the functional similarity between the role filled by the slaves in ancient Greece and Rome and the role filled by those who create the material and spiritual conditions that make cultural achievement possible more generally.[37] When he refers cagily to "slavery in some sense or other" (BGE, 257), Nietzsche uses the term to pick out the condition of those who, in the following passage, he goes on to describe as forming the "foundation and scaffolding" [*Unterbau und Gerüst*] (BGE, 258) that makes for a culture of exceptional human excellence. His discussion of this servile underclass of "mediocrity" (A, 57) in *The Antichrist* suggests that he construes it very broadly indeed. It would appear to extend far beyond those who are the legally-sanctioned chattel of others, and it would appear to extend beyond even a proletariat working class, conventionally understood: "A high culture," he writes in *The Antichrist*, "is a pyramid: it can stand only on a broad base; its first presupposition is a strong and soundly consolidated mediocrity. Handicraft, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greatest part of art, the whole

[37] After describing "high culture" as a "pyramid" dependent on a base of "mediocrity" in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche goes on to echo Aristotle's discussion of natural slavery from the *Politics* 1254a18-23. Nietzsche writes: "To be a public utility, a wheel, a function, for that one must be destined by nature: it is *not* society, it is the only kind of *happiness* [*Glück*] of which the great majority are capable that makes intelligent machines of them. For the mediocre, to be mediocre is their happiness; mastery of one thing, specialization– a natural instinct" (A, 57).

quintessence of *professional* activity, to sum it up, is compatible only with a mediocre amount of ability and ambition" (A, 57). Everyone from doctors and accountants to menial laborers and professors would seem to be included (Cf., HH, 283). To be a slave "in some sense or other"–that is, to be at the base of this pyramid of high culture–needn't involve being the *literal possession* of someone else, though it can take that form in some societies. It needn't, likewise, be a socio-political designation, enforced by government authority, though it of course can be in some societies. It primarily is a *functional role* that one fills in the cultural whole.

Given that Nietzsche sees this "broad base" (A, 57) as necessary for a flourishing culture, it is tempting to see Nietzsche as giving only the following sort of justification for this "slavery in some sense or other": There are certain goods having to do with cultural excellence that slavery, broadly construed, makes possible.[38] And he does appear to think that this slavery is beneficial at the very least on these grounds. But there is a scholarly danger of projecting our views onto Nietzsche, in ways more and less subtle. These days we find slavery, of the sort practiced in ancient Greece and Rome and in the antebellum South, morally repugnant, indeed one the clearest examples of the morally repugnant. And insofar as we take freedom, in some broader sense as self-direction or autonomy, to be our moral and political ideal, we might have qualms about even the more subtle kind of servitude or "slavery in some sense or other" that Nietzsche envisages. Even though this perfectionistically-motivated, instrumentalist-style argument often attributed to Nietzsche in defense of slavery would callously countenance the enslavement (in some sense) of many, ironically it can prove in its own way reassuring to our liberal moral sensibilities, since it allows us to enlist Nietzsche in the view most of us now think is obvious:

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[38] This, for example, is how Rawls (1971), §50 interprets Nietzsche. See also the more measured and subtle remarks of Conway (1997), p. 37.

that whatever cultural goods slavery may secure, it would nonetheless be in the interest of the slaves if they were not slaves. But I think this reading is a misunderstanding of Nietzsche's actual view. His idea, as I have said, is not simply that it is socially or culturally useful to have slaves, or useful to the privileged few to have slaves, but that the sort of slavery he is envisaging is actually in the best interest of the slaves themselves (Cf., A, 54). Such lives might (though needn't) be dangerous, painful, and unpleasant. Some slaves may actually perish. But such lives, he thinks, are actually better than ones frittered away in pursuit of idle pleasures or chasing one's own private (and perhaps debased) conception of the good. While this view may be completely anathema to our moral sensibilities, it has certain affinities with the paternalistic views about slavery held both by Plato and Aristotle.[39] Nietzsche builds on these views, but makes the notion of slavery much more attenuated and much less obviously political in import.[40] He adds a further modern twist by bringing in the notions of human worth and dignity, yet imbuing them with a classical heroic flavor, updated to reflect an aristocracy of merit rather than birth. In

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[39] Plato, *Republic* 590c-d; Aristotle, *Politics* 1254a18-23. For both Plato and Aristotle, it is because the slave does not know what is good for him that he is best subjected to the rule of one who knows better. In a now infamous passage in the *Politics,* Aristotle writes: "But is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature? There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule." (1254a18-23). On Plato, see Vlastos (1981), p.16. On Aristotle, see Heath (2008) and Lear (1988), p.199.

[40] Nietzsche's thinking is not political in the narrow sense that Nietzsche never thinks systematically about what role contemporary governments or states may legitimately play in instituting or maintaining this slavery "in some sense or other." Only by stretching the notion of "the political" so far that it becomes tantamount to what I think would be more accurately described as "the social," can one see Nietzsche as having worked-out "political" ideals for how modern nation states can and should be structured, in light of his ambitious aims for the betterment of humanity. Employing this expansive notion of the political that is characteristic of much recent work on Nietzsche's political philosophy, Yannis Constantinidès (2000) observes that "...ce n'est pas l'État, comme chez la plupart des autres penseurs, qui est au centre de la philosophie politique de Nietzsche, mais la volonté d'ennoblir l'homme. [...it is not the state, as is the case with the majority of other thinkers, that is at the center of Nietzsche's political philosophy, but the will to ennoble man.], p. 219. Nietzsche of course has things to say about the modern state, denigrating its worship by petty nationalists (TSZ, I, "On the New Idol") and lamenting the threat it poses to culture (TI, "Germans," 4). But given that he has no vision for what positive role modern nation states should play in securing his cultural goals, it is misleading to describe his ideal of ennobling man as a *political* as opposed to simply a *social* or *cultural* ideal. Even one of Nietzsche's leading Nazi appropriators, Alfred Bäumler (1931) concedes that there is no basis for extracting a theory of the state from Nietzsche's works, p. 180.

doing so, he turns these modern ideas of worth and dignity completely inside out: Rather than seeing it as detrimental to human worth and dignity to be a slave, Nietzsche argues that it is *in being* a slave that most secure the sort of genuine worth and dignity that is possible for them. As Nietzsche's character Zarathustra puts it, "There are some who threw away their last worth [*Werth*] when they threw away their servitude [*Dienstbarkeit*]" (TSZ, I, "On the Way of the Creator"). Being slaves is the way that most can flourish. In order to establish this reading, I'll explain Nietzsche's position in "The Greek State" and spell out how his view changes as his thought develops. As I shall argue, we see in "The Greek State" a nascent idea about human dignity that Nietzsche develops further in his later work.

VI. "The Greek State" and *The Birth of Tragedy*

Before we consider Nietzsche's essay "The Greek State" itself, we must begin with some important background. When Nietzsche was writing "The Greek State" in the early 1870s, he was convinced if not by Schopenhauer's metaphysics, then at least by Schopenhauer's highly pessimisstic outlook on life, according to which we would have been better off never coming into existence.[41] In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer outlines in vividly poetic detail the reasons why our world is so dreadful. His condemnation of life is premised on the assumption of a kind of hedonism. What ultimately matters is pleasure and pain. Our aim is lasting satisfaction, the state in which we are free from pain. But, Schopenhauer claims, we are systematically deprived of this lasting satisfaction. We are, on his view, doomed to perpetual pain (or else to boredom, itself a kind of pain).[42] I will not get into the niceties of

[41] Schopenhauer is nonetheless strongly opposed to suicide. WWR I, §69.

[42] WWR I, §57-8.

Schopenhauer's argument, since what matters for our purposes here is his pessimistic conclusion itself – not how he gets there or whether he is justified in getting there.[43] And this conclusion of his is that, on balance, life is not worth living: "But as regards the life of the individual, every life-history is a history of suffering, for, as a rule, every life is a continual series of mishaps great and small...[...]...But perhaps at the end of his life, no man, if he be sincere and at the same time in possession of his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again."[44] The arts, according to Schopenhauer, provide one of the few avenues of escape. In aesthetic experience, we are relieved of the inexorable suffering characteristic of the rest of life. In order to understand Nietzsche's argument in "The Greek State," we need to see him as presenting it against a backdrop of these basically Schopenhauerian assumptions about a) the supreme importance and yet impossibility of lasting satisfaction and about b) the ameliorative function of the arts in human life.

Nietzsche's argument in "The Greek State" goes like this: Slavery is essential to a flourishing human society, one in which great cultural achievement–hence great artistic achievement–is possible. But this slavery, especially in the form it took in ancient Greece, is tremendously bad, because of the suffering it inflicts on the slaves. Thus, Nietzsche supposes, we are faced with an unattractive dilemma: We are left either with a highly primitive human society, incapable of any sort of cultural accomplishment, or we are left with a world in which there is cultural accomplishment and yet there is slavery. When it comes to either horn of the dilemma, existence is deeply wanting, because it will be rife with suffering. If there is no culture, there will be no bulwark against suffering, as can be had through the arts and other rarified cultural

[43] For a philosophically rigorous reconstruction of Schopenhauer's arguments, see Reginster (2006), p.106-124.

[44] WWR I, §59.

pursuits.[45] But if there is culture, then there will be slavery. Whether this is a genuine dilemma is not my concern here, for Nietzsche, in any event, appears to think that it is. Since Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer's hedonistic axiology, he thinks that all that ultimately matters is suffering and its avoidance. When we see this dilemma that "existence" forces upon us, Nietzsche thinks that we have all the more vindication for the view that "existence" should be condemned. "Accordingly, we must learn to identify as a cruel-sounding truth the fact that *slavery belongs to the essence of a culture*: a truth, though, which leaves open no doubt about the absolute value of existence. *This truth* is the vulture which gnaws at the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture. The misery of men living a life of toil has to be increased to make the production of the world of art possible for a small number of Olympian men" ("The Greek State").

At the same time that Nietzsche is condemning slavery for the suffering it involves, he is also developing a justification for the very slavery he also condemns. As so often with Nietzsche's works in this period, we find a curious sort of tension within the text.[46] For he goes on to argue at the end of "The Greek State" that the following is "valid in the most general sense":

> [...] every man, with his whole activity, is only dignified to the extent that he is a tool of genius, consciously or unconsciously [*hat nur soviel Würde, als er, bewußt oder unbewußt, Werkzeug des Genius ist*]; whereupon we immediately deduce the ethical conclusion that "man as such," absolute man, possesses neither dignity nor rights nor duties: only as a

[45] Nietzsche at this point sees the main role of art as providing us existential comfort in the face of suffering. Schopenhauer of course thinks that there is another path to salvation as well: It is through a form of saintly resignation. If we cease to desire anything at all, then we will cease to suffer. WWR I, §68. Nietzsche does not mention this possibility, perhaps because he regards it as highly impractical.

[46] One explanation is that Nietzsche felt he needed to tread very carefully around this issue, since his then-idol and mentor Richard Wagner deplored slavery. See Nehamas (2009), p. xxii.

> completely-determined being, serving unconscious purposes, [*völlig determinirtes, unbewußten Zwecken dienendes Wesen*] can man excuse [*entschuldigen*] his existence.[47]

This is an early glimmer in Nietzsche's thinking that there is a way in which a slave (in the broad sense of someone playing a certain functional role) can be dignified. Nietzsche's departure from the Christian and Kantian philosophical tradition surrounding dignity is here notable. Whereas the tradition would have it that being used as a mere means is incompatible with a person's innate dignity, Nietzsche appears to be suggesting that being used as a means (maybe even a mere means) is how most can attain dignity. Moreover, that one freely or knowingly allows this to happen is not at all necessary. Nor is it necessary that one recognizes it *has* happened; for one can be dignified "unconsciously."

This theme of being dignified "unconsciously" resurfaces in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche outlines a slightly different, but similarly radical, conception of human dignity. Whereas the moral tradition would have it that our dignity comes from having a soul or from our capacity for rational agency, Nietzsche takes it that our dignity consists in *ourselves* being works of art (or parts of them), components in the aesthetic spectacle of existence, whether or not we are conscious of the role we play. Nietzsche proposes that as a heuristic we think of ourselves as if we were the instruments–the playthings, in fact–of a artistically-minded demiurge who creates humans for its own entertainment:

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[47] Why does Nietzsche use the word "excuse" here? One hypothesis is the following: Because of the Schopenhauerian presuppositions he is working with, he thinks existence stands condemned and that we would have been better off never having been born. The best sort of apologetic to be made on behalf of individual lives that *do* get lived is that they indirectly contribute to the reduction of human suffering: they enable culture, culture allows for the arts, and the arts free people from suffering.

> For what must be clear to us above all, both to our humiliation *and* our elevation, is that the whole comedy of art is not performed for us, neither for our edification nor our education, just as we are far from truly being the creators of that world of art; conversely, however, we may very well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art, and that our highest dignity [*Würde*] lies in our significance as works of art– for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified* – although, of course, our awareness of our significance in this respect hardly differs from the awareness which painted soldiers have of the battle depicted on the same canvas (BT, 5).

Because Nietzsche in his early work– "The Greek State" and *The Birth of Tragedy*–still endorses Schopenhauer's hedonistic theory of value, he regards this dignity as (a) of no significance in comparison to the suffering one must endure to attain it; and (b) of no value *to us* to the extent we are unaware of it.[48] But as Nietzsche's thought develops, he abandons the Schopenhauerian hedonism present in this early essay of his and in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He comes to reject the idea that phenomenal states, especially pleasure and pain, are the sole bearers of value.[49] What makes our life a good life is not simply that it is filled with pleasure (even exalted kinds of it) or that it is free from suffering. In fact, far from seeing suffering as an

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[48] Nietzsche, I take it, does not think that there really is an artistic demiurge, creating the world for its own entertainment. Nietzsche uses this fictional posit as a heuristic to help us grasp the aesthetic perspective from which our lives, on his view, really do matter.

[49] BGE, 225: "Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaemonism–all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with *pleasure* and *pain*, which are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary, are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground and naïvetés on which everyone conscious of *creative* powers and an artistic conscience will look down not without derision, nor without pity." (Nietzsche must have in mind here a more Epicurean rather than Aristotelian notion of eudaemonia.)

obstacle to having a good life, he comes to see it as necessary for the greatness of what he regards as the best lives–those of creativity, challenge, and accomplishment.[50] What we do matters more than what we feel.

VII. *Schopenhauer as Educator*

This transformation in Nietzsche's thinking, while far from complete, is already underway in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, the third essay in his *Untimely Meditations*.[51] There he takes up and develops his earlier ideas about human dignity, transforming them into an account of what grants one's life greatest worth. He expands on the idea that he first toyed with in "The Greek State." This is the thought that the highest calling of most people is to serve as the instruments of someone else:

> [H]ow can your life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars, and not for the good of the majority, that is to say those who, taken individually, are the least valuable exemplars. And the young person should be taught to regard himself as a failed work of nature but at the same time as a witness to the grandiose and marvelous intentions of this artist: nature has done badly,

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[50] BGE, 225: "You want, if possible– and there is no more insane 'if possible' – *to abolish suffering*. And we? It really seems that *we* would rather have it higher and worse than ever. Well-being as you understand it–that is no goal, that seems to us an *end,* a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible–that makes his downfall [*Untergang*] *desirable*. The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering–do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far?" The attitude that Nietzsche takes toward suffering in his mature work is one of the central themes of Reginster (2006).

[51] It is possible that Nietzsche may continue to endorse this thesis for some period after *Schopenhauer as Educator*. In his middle period works, (HAH, D, GS) it is difficult to find decisive evidence one way or the other. But he has certainly abandoned it by the time of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

> he should say to himself; but I will honor its great intentions by serving it so that one day it may do better. (UM, III:6).

Nietzsche speaks of a two-stage process here. The first stage would seem to be internal, in the sense of taking place within individual people. In seeing a great person, one becomes aware of the great person's greatness, one has shame at one's relative worthlessness, and one gets called to a higher form of life in which one contributes to the flourishing of culture by aiding in the promotion of the great person's excellence (and thereby, in doing so, enhances one's own far more modest excellence).[52] "[O]nly he who has attached his heart to some great man receives thereby the *first consecration to culture*" and acquires this insight.[53] The second stage is external, involving a person's actually working to promote a flourishing culture, the sort carried forward by a few great individuals who serve as "exemplars" to everyone else. What's best, as Nietzsche sees it, is a harmony of the first and second stages. One has the inner transformation and takes up the higher form of life, not because one is compelled by a whip, but *because* one has this inner transformation and takes up this form of life oneself. Imagine a laborer in 15th-Century Florence. He has a comfortable, safe life peddling trinkets on the Ponte Vecchio. But he is inspired by Brunelleschi and comes to see that his life, as he is living it, is shameful. He sees the promise of a higher form of life. He follows Brunelleschi's lead and joins in the building of the Duomo. His life is much harder than it would otherwise be. He suffers from the back-breaking

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[52] Nietzsche writes: "It is true that, as we usually are, we can contribute nothing to the production of the man of redemption: that is why we *hate* ourselves as we usually are..." (UM, III:6).

[53] Cavell (1990) and Conant (2001) draw on these passages from *Schopenhauer as Educator* and use them to argue that Nietzsche is more friendly to a sort of inclusive perfectionism than he has often been perceived to be. Although I do not agree with all aspects of this line of interpretation, I am in basic agreement with them when it comes to the idea that a higher form of life is open to everyone, even if most ignore its call.

labor. But he also has the sense that he is doing something important, and he comes to take great pride in what he does.

This inner transformation can thus serve an existential function. It makes one aware of *why* one's life is significant. For an unreflective animal, suffering is always bad, and the good, for such a creature, consists in mere contentment and happiness. But unlike animals, we are able find meaning in suffering by contributing to some worthwhile project. And it is in entering into this higher, heroic form of life that we transcend our animality (UM, III:5).

As Nietzsche acknowledges, it will still be a difficult pill for most to swallow. "...though one may be ready to sacrifice one's life to a state, for instance, it is another matter if one is asked to sacrifice it on behalf of another individual. It seems to be an absurd demand that one man should exist for the sake of another man" (UM, III:6). (It is, after all, *Brunelleschi* who will be remembered by history and memorialized in a statue gazing on the completed Duomo.) But this sacrifice, Nietzsche thinks, will make a person's life better along one particularly vital dimension. It will give their lives "highest value [or worth]" [*Werth*] and "deepest significance" [*Bedeutung*] to sacrifice themselves for the sake of another in this way (UM, III:6). Paradoxically, though, what these people are doing, although in some sense for the sake of another, is also in a roundabout way for their own sake, in that this sacrifice is what endows their lives with direction and meaning.

Nietzsche, throughout this essay, is navigating his own conflicted relationship with Schopenhauer's teachings. Nietzsche, as I have alluded to already, expresses his qualms about Schopenhauer's metaphysics quite early.[54] At this point, I suspect, he begins to distance himself

[54] See, for example, the sketch in his notebooks entitled "On Schopenhauer" (October 1867-April 1868). In Nehamas and Geuss (eds.) (2009), p. 1-7.

from the heart of Schopenhauer's ethics as well. But he does so in a subtle way, by seizing on and transforming a strand of thinking from one of Schopenhauer's own late essays (itself rather in tension with the hedonistic assumptions predominant in Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, though anticipated somewhat in that text's Fourth Book). Schopenhauer writes, in a passage that Nietzsche quotes:

> A happy life is impossible: the highest that man can attain is a *heroic one*. He leads it who, in whatever shape or form, struggles against great difficulties for something that is to the benefit of all and in the end is victorious, but who is ill-rewarded for it or not rewarded at all. Then, when he has done, he is turned to stone, like the prince in Gozzi's *Re corvo* [sic[55]], but stands in a noble [*edler*] posture and with generous gestures. He is remembered and is celebrated as a hero; his will, mortified a whole life long by effort and labour, ill success and the world's ingratitude, is extinguished in nirvana.[56]

Schopenhauer suggests that one can attain this heroic posture through resignation: By ceasing to will, one not only ceases to suffer (his point in WWR I), but attains a certain nobility. Nietzsche, by contrast, claims that one gets this vestige of nobility not by the cessation of willing, but by participation in culture. Nietzsche talks now about what sorts of lives he thinks really matter: those of great individuals first and foremost of course, but *in addition*, the lives of

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[55] This is a conflation of the titles of two of Carlo Gozzi's plays from 1762: *Il Re Cervo* and *Il Corvo*. The mistake is in Schopenhauer's text.

[56] Quoted in UM, III:4. From Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. II, "Nachträge zur Lehre von der Bejahung und Verneinung des Willens zum Leben," §172a. Schopenhauer compiled and published the essays in *Parerga and Paralipomena* in 1851 (on this point of chronology, see Safranski (1989), p. 352), but it appears that he wrote or at least revised this particular essay after the publication of Volume II of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1844, since he mentions Volume II of WWR in §173 of the same essay.

those who have "*consecrat[ed]*" themselves "*to culture*" (UM, III:6) to bring to fruition the creative visions of these few great people.

While Nietzsche's strong commitment to Schopenhauerian hedonism (at least of WWR I) seems to have waned, a vestige of it still persists in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. A meaningful life has an objective and a subjective component. In addition to *doing* something great, or *participating* in something great, you have to have the recognition that you are doing so and take a kind of subjective satisfaction in this noble enterprise. This, I suggest, is in large part why Nietzsche places such an emphasis on *inner* transformation of the self in this essay. Yet as he works out the implications of his own views–in embryonic form in this passage, as well as in "The Greek State" and *The Birth of Tragedy*–Nietzsche comes to recognize that this awareness of the significance of one's life, however subjectively satisfying and important, is not needed to have a good life. Whether you have lived a good life may well depend on events that come far after your death or from a role that you are not yourself aware of playing. (The soldiers on the painted canvas, remember, are not aware of the role that lends their lives highest dignity (BT, 5); and the prince turned to stone surely can't appreciate the nobly heroic posture in which he is frozen for perpetuity (UM, III:4)). Actual accomplishment is what matters in the first instance to living the best life, not one's knowledge about and attitudes toward this accomplishment.[57]

VIII. Nietzsche's Later Work

Although Nietzsche does not continue to harp on "dignity" as such– perhaps because he realizes that the word is so heavily freighted with what for his purposes are misleading Kantian

[57] Nietzsche's central objections to the utilitarian tradition (at least to his predecessors Mill and Bentham) as well as to (early) Schopenhauer is that they fetishize the phenomenal states of sentient creatures as the only thing of axiological significance.

and Christian implications–his sense of what sort of lives are best, and why they are best, remains congruent with his earlier thinking. Nietzsche's prose grows increasingly more vitriolic, and he characterizes the worth and dignity of humans more frequently in negative terms. He shows us what humans utterly devoid of dignity (in his sense) are like and tries to disgust us with their utterly debased conception of the human good. They are lazy creatures meriting not *Achtung*, but Ver*achtung*. Consider his discussion of the being he calls "the last man" in the Preface to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

> "Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable [*verächtlichsten*] man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise [*verachten*] himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.
>
> "'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' thus asks the last man, and he blinks.
>
> "The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest.
>
> "'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth [...]

> "One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion. [...]
>
> "'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink." (TSZ, "Prologue," 5)

What Nietzsche finds particularly baleful is that these sorts of creatures are so satisfied with their lives that they have lost all motivation to strive for anything higher. As he puts it in the *Genealogy*, using the same imagery of bugs, the "maggot 'man'...the hopelessly mediocre and insipid [*unerquicklich*] man, has already learned to feel himself as the goal and zenith, as the meaning of history" (GM, I:11). In contrast, Nietzsche wants to redirect attention to great human beings as models and as those from whom value radiates. Nietzsche expresses this longing in the *Genealogy*:

> But grant me from time to time– if there are divine goddesses in the realm beyond good and evil–grant me the sight, but *one* glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear! Of a man who justifies *man*, of a complementary and redeeming lucky hit on the part of man for the sake of which one may still *believe in man*! (GM, I:12)

But we should be hesitant to conclude from this emphasis on great individuals that *only* a few great individuals are capable of living good lives.[58] They of course matter most; redemption of the human species is up to them. But the mass of humanity has the capability for ennoblement as well. The basic idea from "The Greek State" through *Schopenhauer as Educator* – that the highest calling of most people is to be in the service of culture – is one Nietzsche never renounces. When seen in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole, the passages (257-8) from *Beyond Good and Evil* with which we began take on a different meaning than they might if viewed in isolation. Nietzsche, as we have seen, is indeed an unrepentant elitist. He agrees, for reasons I have already discussed, with the aristocratic idea that there is a "long ladder of an order of rank" and that there are "differences in worth between man and man" (257). He goes on to write:

> The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy, however, is that it experiences itself *not* as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their *meaning* and highest justification [Sinn *und höchste Rechtfertigung*]–that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake,* [um ihretwillen] must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments. Their fundamental faith has simply to be that society must *not* exist for the sake of society [*die Gesellschaft nicht um der Gesellschaft willen dasein dürfen*] but only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of being–comparable to those sun-seeking vines of Java–they are called *Sipo Matador*–that so long and so often enclasp

[58] As Hurka (2007) supposes, p. 18.

> an oak tree with their tendrils until eventually, high above it but supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and display their happiness (BGE, 258).

Complexities here abound, since this is a statement of the self-centered and self-infatuated attitude the great have toward themselves, viewing themselves as that for the sake of which all else is done.[59] But they are not entirely wrong: Nietzsche thinks that the best examples of humanity, those called to "higher task[s]" and to a "higher state of being," are thereby capable of "justif[ying]" the human species.[60] Here his thinking in *Beyond Good and Evil* is continuous with his earlier and his later work (TSZ, "Prologue," 3; GM I:12). And it also true that Nietzsche, in some sense, agrees with their idea that society does not exist for society's sake. But this is not a new development either. Recall what he says in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. There he is scornful of the idea that a society should live for the "good of the majority...those who, taken individually, are the least valuable exemplars [*Exemplare*]" (UM, III:6) as opposed to living for the best individuals. But, as we have seen, he nonetheless sketches a way in which this higher calling can be beneficial for everyone. It lends greatest worth to a human life to be "sacrificed" to promote the flourishing of great individuals.[61] To be "the foundation and scaffolding" on which a great individual can arise, however much it may be a burden, is in fact one's highest calling. "Being reduced and lowered" to "slaves" or "instruments" (BGE, 258) is thus a gift in disguise.

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[59] Young (2006) also stresses this dimension of the passage, p. 135.

[60] Conway (1997) puts this well: "Superlative human beings contribute to the enhancement of the species as a whole, for they embody, and thus reveal, heretofore unknown perfections resident within the human soul," p. 10

[61] Recall that Nietzsche says that it is not just the weak who are called upon to sacrifice themselves for a noble cause. The great are those "prepared to sacrifice human beings for one's cause, *not excluding oneself"* (TI, "Skirmishes," 38; *emphasis mine*).

There is no evidence in *Beyond Good and Evil* or elsewhere in this period that Nietzsche's views on this score have changed at all from the *Untimely Meditations*.

What Nietzsche *does* give up is the confidence that people would ever be satisfied with being this. Even in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he recognizes that people will try to evade this heroic form of life. The trouble is that most are so caught up in the whirl of the prosaic that they do not hear the call of something higher.[62] "In individual moments, we all know how the most elaborate arrangements of our life are made only so as to flee from the tasks we ought to be performing" (UM, III:5). "[T]he Zeitgeist," Nietzsche says,

> whispers insinuatingly: "Follow me and do not go there! For there you are only servants, assistants, instruments, outshone by higher natures, never happy in being what you really are, pulled along in bonds, laid in chains, as slaves, indeed as automata; here with me you shall, as masters, enjoy your free personality, your talents may glitter by their own light, you yourselves shall stand in the foremost rank, a tremendous following will throng around you, and the public acclamation will surely please you better than a noble assent bestowed from the cold ethereal heights of genius" (UM, III:6)

Many, Nietzsche notes, will succumb to such individualistic enticements and thus evade their highest calling (UM, III:6). By Book V of *The Gay Science*, he appears to think that hope is utterly in vain. No one is content anymore to be a mere part of something greater than themselves. People want to pursue their own private plans of life, their own conceptions of the

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[62] Noting Rorty's remark that Nietzsche consigns "'the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals,' Conant (2001) notes that "if we are relegated to such a status, it is because we relegate ourselves," p. 198.

good, their own personal paths to happiness. What is "dying out," Nietzsche writes, is the "fundamental belief" [*Grundglaube*] "that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is *a stone in a great edifice*" (GS, 356). Nietzsche's pregnant architectural images reflect his conception of the worth of most people. Most are of significance in virtue of providing support for something that is worth more ("*a great edifice*") than they alone are (and that atomic worth Nietzsche takes to be little to nil). This imagery further suggests that they are a fundamental part–if not the most beautiful, justificatory part–of the edifice they compose (GS, 356), or of the pyramid of which they are the base (A, 57), or of the structure of which they are the foundation (BGE, 258). Their highest form of life consists in playing this role. Dignity is not their innate endowment. It is won through servitude, not preserved through freedom.

Whereas Nietzsche thinks in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that he can give ordinary people a satisfying *and* true vision to replace the illusions of the past as something to propel their lives meaningfully forward, he becomes increasingly doubtful that it is possible to do so. Delusion is not optimal, but it may well be beneficial:

> To ordinary human beings, finally–the vast majority, who exist for service [*zum Dienen*] and the public benefit [*zum allgemeinen Nutzen*], and who *may* exist [*dasein dürfen*] only for that, religion gives an inestimable contentment with their station [*Lage*] and their nature [*Art*], manifold peace of the heart, an ennobling of obedience, one piece of joy and sorrow more to share with their fellows, and some transfiguration of the whole everydayness, the whole lowliness, the whole half-bestial poverty of their souls (BGE, 61).

Moreover, Nietzsche chastises those who sow the seeds of rancor among these workers. "Whom do I hate most among the rabble of today?" Nietzsche asks. He answers, "The socialist rabble, the chandala apostles, who undermine the instinct, the pleasure, the worker's sense of satisfaction with his small existence– who make him envious, who teach him revenge. The source of wrong is never unequal rights but the claim of 'equal' rights." (A, 57). In a passage entitled "*The labor question*" [*Arbeiter-Frage*], Nietzsche similarly writes:

> I simply cannot see what one proposes to do with the European worker now that one has made a question out of him. He is far too well off not to ask for more and more, not to ask more immodestly. In the end, he has numbers on his side. The hope is gone that a modest and self-sufficient kind of man, a Chinese[63] type, might here develop as a class: and there would have been reason in that, it would almost have been a necessity...[...]...If one wants an end, one must also want the means: if one wants slaves [*Sklaven*], then one is a fool if one educates them to be masters" (TI, "Skirmishes," 40).

Although it can seem that Nietzsche is recommending here that the workers be made docile for the benefit of the elite alone, he, on my reading, is instead recommending that (in certain cases anyway) they be kept in the dark for a goal that, even if they do not recognize it, is

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[63] Nietzsche's persistent denigration of the Chinese (Cf. also, GS, 24; GM I:12; BGE, 210, where he calls Kant "the great Chinaman of Königsberg") was likely due to the influence of the ludicrous racial and phrenological theories of Count Arthur de Gobineau, the acquaintance with whose themes Nietzsche probably made during his time in Wagner's inner circle. (That Nietzsche, later in his career, was at least minimally familiar with Gobineau is clear from his postcard to Köselitz of 10 December 1888. See KSB, 8:516.) Gobineau's idea in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaine* (1855) is that the Chinese (or "the Yellow Race") seek to live in the easiest and most comfortable way possible, but even so are useful types for carrying out social grunt work. For further discussion of these influences, see Moore (2002), p. 125-6.

in *their* best interest as well. Most people, Nietzsche comes to think, simply do not know what is good for them. The best life for them is not the one *they* would choose, if left to their own devices. On this point, Nietzsche is in strong agreement with both Plato and Aristotle. In his highly paternalistic way, he takes himself to know what is best for the masses. In *Schopenhauer as Educator,* he flirts with the prospect that the great exemplar could convert people to a higher form of life, so that people willingly choose such a life and even relish it. In his later work, this optimism disappears.

So the true Nietzschean story about why one's life matters, even if correct, is going to prove utterly unsatisfying for most, yet religious illusions rendering workers content with their station (BGE, 61) are also growing increasingly unstable in the modern era. In this predicament, people will lose all motivation to strive for anything higher. In Nietzsche's image (BGE, "Preface"), the bow, with which we could shoot for distant goals, will become slack and the arrows will not reach their targets.[64] Nihilism looms as the result. And for this affective brand of nihilism, there is no clear remedy, either from the truth *or* from lies. Therein is the rub. The prospects for making our contemporary culture a flourishing one are thus dim to none. But even if Nietzsche gives up hope that this will be a practical success in our era of terminal decadence, he still maintains this cultural flourishing as an ideal, against which we compare unfavorably.

IX. Conclusion

If we follow the line of interpretation that I have presented, we recognize that Nietzsche holds that it is actually a better world in which there are "slaves" (in a certain sense) who

[64] For this characterization of nihilism, see Pippin (2010).

contribute to something great, as opposed to a world in which all are free (in a certain correlative sense). And it is not just better because we have the wonders of culture, but it is better for those slaves individually, to a certain extent regardless even of how *they* feel about things. Thus, it is wrong to hold that the ways of life lauded by morality are in the best interest of the weak. What is *really* in the interest of the weak is a heroic life whose strenuous call they will evade. Once we realize this, we see that Nietzsche's view is at least more admirable than thinking that slaves are expendable tools to be exploited, mere instruments who get nothing in return for their servitude. That is how Nietzsche has often been understood, and it is a serious misconception that I have here tried to correct.

But even so, one remains deeply unsettled with Nietzsche's ideas. This is so even once one puts aside all practical questions (that Nietzsche never seriously considers) about how all this might be implemented in a society. This is so even once one puts aside a sobering history of convenient paternalistic claims that slavery (albeit in forms much worse) is actually in the interest of the enslaved. This is so even once one puts aside the horrors of Third Reich, who, however grotesquely and ironically misguided they were in their misreadings of Nietzsche, had more points of affinity with him than many scholars are willing to admit in their zeal to turn Nietzsche into someone less frightening and dangerous.

Setting all of these serious practical and historical issues aside, whose importance I would not want to diminish, one is still left with qualms about the details of Nietzsche's view itself. There is little place on his view, after *Schopenhauer as Educator*, for most of us setting our own course of life in accordance with our conception of the good (our conception once we are awakened to it anyway). Indeed, though it is not ideal, we can in principle live a great

Nietzschean life without realizing and taking satisfaction in the fact that we have done so. Moreover, the dignity that most of us take to serve as the basis for how we should treat others is something Nietzsche implies is a convenient fantasy of the weak. He time and again calls into question so many things we hold dear as the cornerstones of the good life and of moral solidarity. And yet, however much he seems to overstate his case, however much he repulses us with his ideas and his rhetoric, he can leave us with the uncomfortable fear that he may be on to something, that our lives, as we are living them, do not actually matter; that we are like the "last men" in our diminished aspirations; that the value we place on our private projects and our personal fulfillment is somehow misplaced; that, insofar as we have not made a significant mark on the world or have not participated in something greater than ourselves, no important trace of us lives past our death. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche speaks of George Eliot with withering disdain (TI, "Skirmishes," 5). But, as so often with those Nietzsche attacks most viciously–Wagner, Kant, and Socrates most notably–his hostility conceals important points of affinity: Even the multitude who will "rest in unvisited tombs," to quote the eloquent words that close *Middlemarch*, can, Nietzsche thinks, have lives worthy of great respect when they aid in flourishing of those exceptional artists and statesmen whose tombs *are* visited in droves. In their toil these workers get their "consecration to culture" (UM, III:6) in the monuments that outlast us all, most beautifully evident in the cathedrals that will never more be built, whose spires tried in vain to soar to heaven, but managed to reach a more fragile and earthly sort of permanence.

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Works by Nietzsche are cited by section number using the following abbreviations and translations, which I have modified where I've thought appropriate.

A= *The Antichrist*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
BGE= *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
BT= *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs
D= *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale
EH= *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
GM= *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
GS= *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
"Greek State"="The Greek State," trans. Carol Diethe
HH= *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale
TI= *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
TSZ= *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann
UM= *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale

In works that comprise several individual essays, after the abbreviation is the essay number (as a Roman numeral) and section number (as an arabic numeral). For example, GM, I:2 is *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I, Section 2. In works that include titled main sections, I include a key word for that section, followed by subsection numbers, if applicable. For example, TI, "Socrates," 1 is the *Twilight of the Idols* section "The Problem of Socrates," sub-section 1

For the German I rely on the following, cited by volume and page number.
KSA= Kritische Studienausgabe, ed. Colli and Montinari (de Gruyter).

Citations of Nietzsche's letters are by volume and page number.
KSB= Kritische Sämtliche Briefe, ed. Colli and Montinari (de Gruyter).

Citations of Kant refer to the volume and page number of the Academy edition (e.g., Ak. 4:392). I quote Allen Wood's translation of the *Groundwork* and Mary Gregor's of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Citations of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* ('WWR') are by volume and section number, and citations of his *Parerga and Parilipomena* by volume and essay name. I here quote the translations of E.F.J. Payne. Citations of Marx are from the *Early Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Joseph O'Malley, Cambridge University Press. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is cited by section number, and I rely on the 1995 edition printed by Doubleday. Plato and Aristotle are cited by Stephanus and Bekker number respectively.

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