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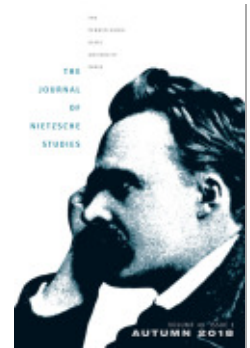
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## Moral Critique and Philosophical Psychology

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Nietzsche knew that philosophers will tend to fall into a characteristic habit: “they take the most recent manifestation of man [. . .] as the fixed form from which one has to start out” (*HH* I:2). This seems to include the habit of taking the most recent manifestation of philosophy in the same spirit. Of course, we cannot escape our own horizons, abandon all our vocabulary, and forget what we have learned. We interpret from where we stand. But if anybody thinks that analytic philosophizing as it has been practiced for the last few decades *fixes* the nature of all philosophy, either in its form or in its content, they are thinking immodestly. Venturing back in time to impress the same form and content on earlier texts might well be called a kind of intellectual colonialism. It would at any rate be to lack historical sense, and so to apply a thought like this to Nietzsche in particular would show us as deaf to the very author we are interested in understanding.

### Moral Critique and Philosophical Psychology

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Given the richness of Nietzsche’s texts and the variety of his concerns, picking just a few key topics is no easy task. I am going to focus on two issues that are both obvious and elusive: obvious, because they are some of Nietzsche’s central concerns, and elusive, because the literature hasn’t yet come to terms with these topics. Nietzsche’s approach to these topics is distinctive, his arguments complex and interwoven, so that his discussions can appear incongruously varied, even contradictory.

First, *how should we understand Nietzsche’s critique of morality?* There is a cluster of questions concerning the status of Nietzsche’s critiques of moralities, values, cultures, and individuals. Nietzsche’s texts are overflowing with claims about the ways in which these things can flourish or be degenerate, can express ascending or declining life, can manifest heightened or impeded will to power, can be symptomatic of nihilism or of life-affirmation. But how should we understand these claims?

Let me break this question into several parts. First, it’s obvious that Nietzsche employs notions such as health, power, flourishing, and life when engaging in these critiques. He will tell us that a particular moral

commitment is expressive of declining life, or that it undermines power, or that it is unhealthy, or that it leads us to negate life. So we have two questions about how these concepts should be understood:

Are some of these concepts (health, power, life, flourishing, affirmation, etc.) more basic in the order of *explanation*? That is, does Nietzsche *define* some of these concepts in terms of the others? Might some of these concepts be *reducible* to others?

Are some of these concepts more basic in the order of *justification*? For example, does Nietzsche justify the normative status of health by appealing to the normative status of power?

My own view is that *will to power* is basic in both the order of explanation and the order of justification. Thus, health, life, and flourishing are defined in terms of configurations of power; and the normative status of these notions is vouchsafed by their connection to power. However, I do not think these are straightforwardly reducible to one another: thus, being capable of affirming one's life might tend to bear a certain relationship to willing power successfully, but these can also come apart. In any case, there's a great deal of further work to be done on these topics. For example, Ian Dunkle, John Richardson, and Andrew Huddleston have offered fascinating analyses of Nietzsche's notion of health and its connection to power (e.g., Dunkle, *Nietzsche's Will to Health* (unpublished dissertation); Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]; Huddleston, "Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul," *Inquiry* 60.1 [2017]: 135–64).

But there's yet another, third question:

Does Nietzsche attempt to offer any *ultimate* justification of his critical employment of these notions?

Grant, for the sake of argument, that something like my interpretation is correct: Nietzsche defines flourishing and health in terms of power; and he says that we should care about flourishing and health because we care about power. Yet then we ask: why should we care about power? After all, Nietzsche tells us that some of our deepest commitments (such as our valuations of compassion, dignity, equality, democracy, etc.) conflict with power. So, absent an argument showing why we should care about

power, we can imagine individuals saying that the fact that valuing human equality conflicts with valuing power is a reason to reject power rather than equality.

So, in addition to asking how these notions relate to one another, we have to ask whether Nietzsche offers any ultimate justification for whichever notion he treats as basic in the order of justification (whether it be health, power, affirmation, etc., or some combination of these). Here, interpretations diverge widely. The postmodernist readings that were dominant in the eighties and nineties saw Nietzsche as lacking any real answer to this question: his views on metaphysics, epistemology, and so forth were supposed to rule out the possibility of providing theory-independent arguments for normative claims. More recently, some of the commentators who emphasize Nietzsche's naturalistic commitments have thought that these commitments rule out substantive arguments for ultimate normative commitments. So, on these readings, Nietzsche may prefer that people be healthy (as he defines health), or that they will power (in his technical sense), or that they realize aesthetically appealing lives (by his standards), but, to someone who doesn't share his preferences for these things, Nietzsche has nothing to offer.

I find it hard to believe that this could be Nietzsche's view: a thinker as subtle as Nietzsche, who spends his life critiquing and analyzing the preferences of those who favor various values, could hardly have been satisfied merely by voicing his own ungrounded preferences for various values. But *if* Nietzsche has something to offer—if he aspires to provide some argument in favor of our commitment to power, health, or some other notion—what might it look like? It's obvious that Nietzsche rejects standard realist accounts, according to which values have some strong form of metaphysical objectivity. Instead, he claims that values are in some sense created by human beings; values are dependent on valuers. Now, there are many different ways of understanding what this could mean. On the crudest possible version, it would mean that preferences and values coincide: if I prefer something, it counts as a value for me. This is certainly *too* crude, so most philosophers who endorse these views think we can simultaneously maintain (1) that all values are created and (2) that we have some way of distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable values. The Kantian, for example, thinks that all values are created, but also that in virtue of valuing anything at all we commit ourselves to valuing our own capacity to bestow value; and this commitment to valuing our capacity to bestow

value is supposed to be equivalent to a commitment to the Categorical Imperative, which in turn shows certain normative commitments to be acceptable and others unacceptable. Or, the prototypical British sentimentalist thinks that all values are created, but also that certain human sentiments (usually sympathy or benevolence) constrain acceptable values for those with standard psychological configurations. So again, we have a commitment to the claim that all values are created, coupled with the idea that we can offer rational argumentation in favor of certain values and against others.

Of course, Nietzsche rejects Kantianism and standard sentimentalism. My point is simply that a philosopher can maintain that all values are created while thinking that there is some way of distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable values. Nietzsche could, for example, accept a form of sentimentalism in which he treats will to power, striving for health, or some other widely shared motivational tendency as giving us grounds for distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable values. Or he could adopt some version of Aristotelian naturalism, according to which a specification of our nature entails a specification of what it is for us to flourish. Or he could endorse some non-Kantian version of constructivism or constitutivism; Alex Silk defends the former whereas I defend the latter. On my constitutivist interpretation, Nietzsche's characterizations of will to power are attempts to show that drive-motivated actions exhibit a certain structural feature, a constitutive aim. I argue that this structural feature (will to power) is present to some degree in all actions and is ineradicable, which gives us reason to reject any values that undermine or conflict with it. Thus, we get a way of sorting acceptable and unacceptable values: the acceptable ones are conducive to, or at least not in pervasive conflict with, will to power, whereas the unacceptable ones are not.

These are complex issues and attempts to approach them are sometimes clouded by confusions. Let me mention two factors that often lead interpreters astray. The first is Nietzsche's rejection of universalism: Nietzsche denies that there is a single way of life and a single set of values that is appropriate for all individuals. The second is the fact that Nietzsche frequently claims to be writing for the few, rather than the many. These features, either singly or in combination, lead some readers to think that Nietzsche's evaluative claims are merely pronouncements for those who share his tastes. But that's just a mistake: even if you're writing for the few, you may be writing about issues that apply to the many. Even if you're a proponent of a

nonuniversalist ethical theory, you may offer rational argumentation in favor of it. To illustrate this, consider a few lines from Henry Sidgwick:

It may be right to teach openly to one set of persons what it would be wrong to teach to others . . . a Utilitarian may reasonably desire, on Utilitarian principles, that some of his conclusions should be rejected by mankind generally; or even that the vulgar should keep aloof from his system as a whole, in so far as the inevitable indefiniteness and complexity of its calculations render it likely to lead to bad results in their hands. (Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1874/1981], 489–90)

Sidgwick is a paradigmatic moral philosopher, beloved of Parfit and other analytic ethicists, but he shares the Nietzschean desire to write for the few, to hide his conclusions from the many, and to have different sets of ethical ideals accepted by the many and by the few. This is just an illustration—Nietzsche obviously doesn't share Sidgwick's utilitarian commitments—but I hope it shows just how odd some of the inferences in the Nietzsche literature are. Who Nietzsche is writing for and whether he wants different populations to accept different ideals have no direct bearing on the justificatory questions.

Once we sort all of this out, though, we are left with a further problem. All of the notions that are plausible candidates for Nietzschean values are strikingly open-ended. Power, health, life-affirmation, and so forth do not name concrete, determinate ends. Moreover, whatever particular results they entail are going to vary across different types of individuals, giving us, for example, different results in the herd and in the exceptional individuals. What's a danger to the many may be a panacea to the few, and conversely. How should we make sense of this? In general:

How exactly do Nietzsche's evaluative commitments bear on individuals, cultures, values, commitments, and so on?

Here's one way in which they bear: Nietzsche articulates various pathologies that can be induced and exacerbated by our moral commitments, or more generally by our ways of conceptualizing the normative domain. Some of these are familiar: consider the discussion in *GM* of the way in

which a certain understanding of agency, as libertarian freedom, attracts the weak and impotent while at the same time entrenching and magnifying that very impotence (see my article “The Relevance of History for Moral Philosophy: A Study of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*,” in *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*, ed. Simon May [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 170–92). I think many of Nietzsche’s applications of his evaluative commitments take roughly that form: he thinks that some ways of conceptualizing morality, agency, consciousness, freedom, and so forth are not just idle intellectual errors, but are things that generate or promote individual and cultural pathologies. This is the sense in which morality can be dangerous: certain ways of conceptualizing the moral domain can draw out problems that might otherwise remain latent. Additionally, they can produce psychological and cultural defects that then become entrenched features of human life. Bernard Reginster (in his forthcoming book on *GM*) and Frederick Neuhouser (in several articles on “social pathology”) are doing extremely interesting work on these topics. Some of my recent work, on Nietzsche’s understanding of “higher values,” explores a related question: whether normative commitments can exhibit the same individual and social functions once they’re openly recognized as created, historically contingent, and rationally optional. I think we need much more work on these topics.

The second key issue in Nietzsche interpretation focuses on another question: *How should we understand Nietzsche’s philosophical psychology?* One of the richest veins in Nietzsche’s texts is his philosophical psychology. He famously tells us that psychology is the path to the fundamental problems. And he pursues those fundamental problems, in part, by giving us accounts of drives, affects, selfhood, valuing, the consciousness/unconscious relationship, self-knowledge, self-opacity, and so on. But how are these to be understood? I’ve given an account of the overall structure of these concepts (*The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016]). But much more remains to be done. We need explorations of Nietzsche’s analyses of particular emotions, affects, and drives; examinations of the pathologies that he thinks can be induced by certain configurations of affect; studies of Nietzsche’s frequent use of virtue terms; analyses of the way in which Nietzsche’s philosophical psychology might give us arguments against contemporary theories of agency and motivation; and so on.

I will mention one issue in a bit more depth. I have argued elsewhere that Nietzsche's distinction between conscious and unconscious mental states should be understood as a difference in the *structure* of mental events rather than a difference in the *awareness* of those events ("Nietzsche's Theory of Mind: Consciousness and Conceptualization," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 [2005]: 1–31; for an improved interpretation, see *The Nietzschean Self*). Today, we typically use the term "conscious" to pick out mental states that are actual or possible objects of introspective awareness. Nietzsche often (but not always) uses it differently: in key passages, such as GS 354, he claims that conscious and unconscious events differ in that the former, but not the latter, are linguistic or conceptual. The key point, for Nietzsche, is this: that with the emergence of language and concepts, the way in which our mental economies function is transformed in far-reaching ways.

Feuerbach wrote, "The *obtuse* [*geistlose*] Materialist says: 'Man is distinguished from the brute *only* by consciousness—he is an animal with consciousness superadded'; not reflecting, that in a being which awakes to consciousness, there takes place a *qualitative change and differentiation* of the entire nature" (*Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot [New York: Prometheus Books, 1841/1989], 3 n. 1). All too many commentators treat Nietzsche as an obtuse materialist (or clumsy naturalist, as we might say today), neglecting the role of language and consciousness. In a way, this is astonishing: almost everything that occupies Nietzsche's attention is a normatively characterized, interpretive phenomenon. From his earliest worries about the motivating forces in Greek culture and the crisis of self-understanding that they produced, to his concerns about meaning, aesthetic interpretation, and the possibility of affirmation, to his increasingly impassioned warnings about the dangers induced by ascetic morality, nihilism, and the loss of higher values, there is a pervasive concern with phenomena that can arise only for self-conscious, self-interpreting beings.

Certainly, Nietzsche constantly emphasizes that we overestimate the conscious and underestimate the unconscious; he tells us that most of what we value, think, feel, and will is shaped and driven by unconscious factors. But commentators tend to slide from claims about the ubiquity and forcefulness of unconscious processes to claims about the unimportance or even the inertness of conscious processes. This simply does not follow. When Nietzsche warns us that we've focused solely on *x* and ignored *y*, he does not



want us to make the opposite, equally naïve error of ignoring *x* and focusing solely on *y*. An explanation of Christianity's role in European history, or Renaissance humanism's impact on early modernity, or the ascetic tendencies present in modern ideals, which attempted to ignore conscious interpretations or treat them as epiphenomenal (in any interesting sense) would be ludicrous. And Nietzsche knows this. (An interpretive interlude: I say *epiphenomenal in any interesting sense* because it's possible to define epiphenomenalism in such a way that it becomes inconsequential. For example, suppose we define epiphenomenalism about consciousness as the view that the causal efficacy of a mental state *M* doesn't depend on *M*'s being conscious. This sort of claim, which has recently been defended in the literature, doesn't rule out any interesting philosophical theses. For example, it's compatible with the claim that *acquiring* or *forming* *M* requires *M*'s being conscious; it's compatible with the idea that only conscious creatures can have *M*; it's compatible with even the most hyperintellectualist theories of agency, such as Korsgaard's version of Kant. And let me take this opportunity to interject, without defense, an interpretive principle: Nietzsche is interested in offering precise philosophical distinctions only when they make a difference, only when they do important work.)

People are conscious, interpreting animals, and these conscious interpretations often distort their object. But these distortions are not idle: they influence the nature of the interpreted object. To conceive of ourselves as sinful and guilty, for example, doesn't make it so: but it does alter our relationship to our own activities, the emotions that we experience, the cultural institutions that we take part in, the values that we are inclined to embrace, and so on. We need more work analyzing the particular ways in which this occurs (I explore some of these points in my "Nietzsche and Murdoch on the Moral Significance of Perceptual Experience," *European Journal of Philosophy* 26.1 [2018]: 525–45). And there is, incidentally, a body of brilliant and underappreciated work on this general topic. In the aftermath of Nietzsche, some of the early German sociologists including Georg Simmel, Max Weber, and Max Scheler applied Nietzschean insights to analyze cultural phenomena. Many of their works are staggeringly insightful. They can serve as models for Nietzschean critiques of moral and cultural phenomena. Unfortunately, few philosophers—and fewer Nietzscheans—read these works.

I have mentioned two central areas for further research in Nietzsche scholarship: the status of his critiques of morality and analysis of his philosophical psychology. Let me close by mentioning one thing that I

wish Nietzsche scholarship would move away from: fear of emphasizing Nietzsche's distinctiveness. Until quite recently, Nietzsche was not widely regarded as one of the giants of philosophy: he was not set alongside Kant, Hume, Plato, Aristotle, and so on. That has changed, or at least has begun to change. But it has bred an insecurity that is still manifest in the literature. A large segment of the Nietzsche literature focuses on showing that Nietzsche is important because he said *x* and someone else who is thought to be important also says *x*. Thus, we have writers on Nietzsche whose highest aspiration is to show that Nietzsche anticipates some (soon to be overturned) claim in contemporary empirical psychology, or that his theory of *x* is analogous to "leading philosopher so-and-so's" musings, or that he develops an idea that Hume or some other widely respected philosopher also develops. This uncritical deference to contemporary philosophical and psychological fashions is something that Nietzsche himself derided. Aside from that, the rewards of these readings tend to be exceptionally low. At best, Nietzsche turns out to be someone who offered an obscure, fumbling anticipation of some view that contemporary philosophers or psychologists state with much greater clarity and precision. If that is all Nietzsche has to offer, only an antiquarian interest would lead us to read him. But manifestly this is *not* all that Nietzsche has to offer. The most interesting Nietzsche scholarship abjures this deferential approach and explores Nietzsche's ideas in their own right.

### Nietzsche's Futurism

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I would like to answer this question about the future of Nietzsche studies with a question about Nietzsche's studies of the future. From the start of his career, with *BT*, until the end, with *EH*, Nietzsche was obsessed with imagining, anticipating, and shaping the future. Why is that? What is it about Nietzsche's distinctive philosophical orientation that caused him to be so preoccupied in this way?

We Nietzsche scholars have spent considerable time and energy dwelling on his historicist convictions and practices, but very little on his futurist