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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES
School of Humanities

Nietzsche's Autonomy Ideal
by
Daniel John Clifford

Thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
ABSTRACT
FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
Doctor of Philosophy
NIETZSCHE'S AUTONOMY IDEAL
by
Daniel John Clifford

The aim of this thesis will be to give an elucidation of Nietzsche's ideal of the post-moral autonomous individual: to give a picture of what Nietzsche takes such an individual to look like, and to show how this picture relates to some of Nietzsche's most fundamental philosophical concerns. Overall, my argument will be that autonomy, or rather the degree of autonomy that a person possesses, is a function of the power of that person in relation to the other people and forces, and of their ability to extend their will over long periods of time. Moreover, the achievement of the highest degrees of autonomy, and by extension the achievement of the greatest levels of power, requires imposing (whether intentionally or not) an ethic upon one's actions and one's self. There are several features that this ethic must have if it is adequately to perform its function: it must be self-chosen rather than simply picked up from one's surroundings, it must act to give unity to the most diverse collection of collection of drives and affects possible for the person who holds it, and it must be well tailored to fit their specific natural constitution.

In order to establish this I will focus on four main issues: the significance of the sovereign individual of GM II: 2, the role of ethics/values in Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy, the relation between Nietzsche's deflationary account of consciousness and his views of freedom, and the notion of unity at play in Nietzsche's writings. I will also offer some thoughts on the coherence of Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy with his thoughts on life-affirmation.

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Author's Declaration

I, Daniel John Clifford, declare that the thesis entitled "Nietzsche's Autonomy Ideal" and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, my aim will be to give an elucidation of Nietzsche's ideal of the autonomous individual: to give a picture of what Nietzsche takes such an individual to look like, and to show how he ties in to some of Nietzsche's most fundamental philosophical concerns. In doing so, I will draw upon his works from *Daybreak* onwards, i.e. from those of his writings which he tells us in *Ecce Homo* constitute his "campaign against *morality*"¹ (EH, "Why I Write Such Good Books", D: 1). In general, I will try to focus on the published works where possible, but I will not avoid using his unpublished notes on principle where they seem especially clear or helpful.

In the remainder of this introduction I will outline the structure of my thesis. Before doing so, however, it will be worth making some brief preliminary remarks. Firstly, I will give a little more detail about what I take my target to be. As is well known, Nietzsche's works contain a large critical element. Many of the traditional concepts employed in philosophy, such as substance, being, self, truth, objectivity and so on, are subjected to fierce scrutiny and found to be either incoherent or lacking any application in the real world. And freedom,² another staple of the philosophical tradition, is certainly among those notions that Nietzsche attacks. My main interest in this thesis, however, will not be with Nietzsche's critical remarks on the subject.³ Rather, my interest will be in

¹All emphasis throughout this thesis is Nietzsche's unless otherwise stated.

²I will follow Nietzsche in using the terms 'free' and 'autonomous' and their cognates interchangeably throughout this thesis.

³Although obviously I will touch on these issues at several points throughout the course of

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the role autonomy plays in the positive aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, i.e. in those parts of his corpus where he is not merely attacking traditional ideas, but is actually engaged in some of the conceptual rebuilding work that is required if we take his critical tirades seriously.

This positive aspect of Nietzsche's thought may often be a lot more tentative or experimental in comparison with his infamously ferocious attacks on accepted philosophical notions. In spite of this, I still hope to show that there is enough coherence and substance in Nietzsche's remarks on this topic to make them worthy of consideration. There is, however, one misunderstanding which should be warded off right at the very beginning. As was just mentioned moments ago, Nietzsche's positive recommendations for the future of mankind have a somewhat experimental and provisional character. As such, they do not necessarily or even obviously present a unified and coherent whole. Instead, they more closely resemble a set of related suggestions—suggestions that all issue from one man with his own relatively stable preferences and views, to be sure, but suggestions that differ significantly from each other in many respects. In looking at Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy, therefore, I do not claim to be exhausting the positive side of Nietzsche's thought, but rather to be examining one recurrent thread. This is a topic that will be touched upon again in Chapter VI.

I will begin my investigation in Chapter II by looking at a figure who often features prominently in discussions about Nietzsche's views on autonomy: the sovereign individual. Here, I will examine three different interpretations one might give of the role this figure plays in Nietzsche's thought and argue for the one I find most convincing. More specifically I will claim that, contrary to the standard reading, the sovereign individual does not straightforwardly represent any Nietzschean autonomy ideal for the future, but is rather a figure from the past. I will then go on to give some thoughts about what significance this figure does have for Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy if we accept the interpretation I have argued for. My argument here will be that we should see this figure as being somewhat analogous to the noble of the First Essay. As an example of healthy humanity from the past, he draws Nietzsche's admiration and possesses

my argument.

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some of the qualities that Nietzsche would like to see return to mankind in the future. As a figure from a different period of history, however, the sovereign individual can no longer be directly recreated as the conditions which made his existence possible (such as human beings naturally possessing a relatively simple and coherent collection of drives) are no longer present. As such, we should not see the sovereign individual as straightforwardly representing Nietzsche's autonomy ideal, but rather as being an instructive figure from history—a figure that we can learn certain important lessons about human freedom from, but not one which we should be trying to directly replicate in modern conditions.

In the following chapter I will look at the relationship between autonomy and ethics in Nietzsche's philosophy. As a preliminary to this, I will begin by saying a little bit about the stipulative use of the term 'ethics' that I will use throughout the chapter, and more specifically about how it relates to the ethics/morality distinction employed by Bernard Williams. After these preliminaries, I will then argue for two separate but related points. The first is that, like many thinkers before him in the Western philosophical tradition, Nietzsche sees being ethical, in a suitably specified sense, as being required for living autonomously. The second point I will argue for, which is more specific to Nietzsche, is that the highest degrees of autonomy can only be achieved by living one's life according to an ethic which is both self-created and personalized. Or, put another way, that in order to attain to the greatest levels of autonomy possible for human beings, a person cannot just unthinkingly accept the dominant morality of their age and culture. Rather, they must create their own values, and ideally must do so in such a way that the new values they adopt cohere particularly well with the rank order of drives and affects that constitute their self, and hence work to enhance the flourishing of the specific type of natural creature that they are.

After this, I will then spend a chapter looking at how Nietzsche's views on autonomy fit with what I shall call his 'delationary' account of consciousness. This chapter will be split into two halves. In the first half, I will look at Nietzsche's critical remarks concerning the efficacy of our conscious thoughts and desires, and consider whether they pose major difficulties for any Nietzschean ideal of autonomy. Here, I will argue against more radical interpretations of

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these remarks which see them as expressing Nietzsche's commitment to the goal of totally eliminating conscious processes from our explanations of human behaviour. Attributing this sort of aim to Nietzsche, I will claim, is both incompatible with his doctrine of perspectivism, as well as seriously at odds with his actual practice in the published works. In place of this, I will argue, we should see Nietzsche as still maintaining some role for consciousness in our explanations of people's actions, but a drastically reduced one compared to the highly mentalistic and voluntarist picture of the generation of actions that had previously held sway in the philosophical tradition up to the point at which Nietzsche was writing. The second half of the chapter will then deal with Nietzsche's remarks concerning the *value* of consciousness as a faculty. In this latter half of the chapter, I will give an exposition of Nietzsche's concerns about consciousness' contribution to the health (or rather, to the sickness) of European man. Ultimately, however, I will argue that these concerns do not exclude consciousness as a faculty from playing an important role in Nietzsche's positive vision for the future of mankind. This is because, on Nietzsche's view, the value of any given thing is not fixed for all time, but is rather a function of the use it has been put to by the latest will to power to appropriate it and give it a new meaning. Hence, the fact that mankind's heightened level of consciousness has often been harmful in the past does not rule out the possibility that it could be turned to a new, more positive use by individuals who become free in the future.

In Chapter V I will turn to an analysis of the notion of unity at work in Nietzsche's conception of autonomy. In this chapter, my main aim will be to elucidate the sort of unity of character that Nietzsche both uses as a standard of evaluation in itself, and sees as intimately linked to the attainment of autonomy. To begin with, however, I will look at a more basic sort of unity that is presupposed by this more complex form: that of the physical body. Here, I will argue that the unity of the body is not more basic than that of the soul because it is a different type of unity. Rather, like that of the character, any unity possessed by the body is organizational—the only major difference is that the organizational unity of the body is both older and more stable. After this, I will then go on to look at the more complex form of unity which Nietzsche sees as being deeply

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connected with autonomy: the unity of a person's *soul* or *character*. Here, I will look at *why* Nietzsche sees this sort of unity as being necessary for the autonomous individual, along with looking at a variety of the different metaphors that Nietzsche himself uses in characterizing this sort of unity, and trying to see what can be gleaned from each of them. Following this, I will look at another notion which is closely associated with unity in Nietzsche's thinking: diversity. Here, I will look at Nietzsche's claim that the highest individuals are those who manage to unify the most diverse and conflicting sets of drives and affects possible. In relation to this aspect of Nietzsche's thought, my argument will be that this is not any sort of merely arbitrary or aesthetic preference on his part, but rather is motivated by his belief that unity-in-diversity is a route to the greatest degrees of power, and by extension autonomy, possible for human individuals. Finally, I will then end this chapter by looking at the potential objection that Nietzsche's notion of unity is nothing more than a formal requirement, and by considering some possible responses that might be made to this charge.

I will then conclude in the final chapter with some thoughts on how Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy relates to his frequent remarks about the affirmation of life, and also to related notions such as the eternal recurrence and *amor fati*. Here, I will consider a possible tension that might be seen to arise between these two aspects of Nietzsche's thought, and consider several ways in which it might be resolved. I will not attempt to give a definitive answer to this question in this concluding chapter. Rather, my intention will be to point to further questions that the research undertaken in the rest of my thesis could point to.

CHAPTER II

THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL

Compared to many other mainstream philosophical writers, Nietzsche makes abundant use of symbolic figures or characters in order to achieve his ends. In his first book *The Birth of Tragedy*, for instance, his reasoning revolves around his own particular conceptions of the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus, as well as his psychological sketches of historical figures such as Socrates and Euripides. Undoubtedly the greatest number of examples could be drawn from his most literary work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Zarathustra himself, the *Übermensch*, the last human beings, the spirit of gravity, etc.), but there is also no shortage of such characters in the more polemical writings that follow.¹

Nowhere is this more true than in *On the Genealogy of Morality*,² where figures such as the noble (or master), the slave, and the priest play an integral role in history of morality that Nietzsche describes. In this chapter, I will examine the significance of another much discussed figure from the *Genealogy*: the sovereign individual of the Second Essay. This character has particular relevance to my overall project of examining Nietzsche's ideal of the autonomous individual. Not only is he described as the "master of the *free will*", but he also, if the standard interpretation of this passage is to be believed, represents a type

¹Socrates resurfaces in the section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "The Problem of Socrates", and the free spirit appears fairly frequently from *Human, All Too Human* onwards. Christ and Dionysus also figure often in the later works, in a relationship both similar and different to that between Apollo and Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Other candidates might include the philosophers of the future, as well as his characterizations of historical figures such as Goethe, Napoleon, and Shakespeare (amongst others).

²I shall refer to this work simply as the *Genealogy* from this point onwards.

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of achieved autonomy that Nietzsche believes it valuable for us all (or at least a certain portion of higher individuals) to strive after. Hence, if the standard reading is correct, the sovereign individual offers a ready-made formula for the type of autonomous individual that Nietzsche envisions existing in the post-moral stage of mankind that he is attempting to bring about through his writings.

Despite only (explicitly³) being treated of in one passage (GM II: 2) the sovereign individual has made many appearances in commentaries on Nietzsche's philosophy. Moreover, and as with many aspects of Nietzsche's thought, this passage has been understood in a variety of ways. Hence, the first part of my task will be exegetical—determining exactly what role Nietzsche intends the sovereign individual to play in the story of the Second Essay. In order to do this, I will consider three different readings of the passage in question. Firstly, I will examine the most common view, that the sovereign individual straightforwardly represents some sort of Nietzschean ideal of autonomy, and that sovereignty (as described in GM II: 2) is something Nietzsche would have his higher individuals (if not everyone) attain to. After this, I will look at a view that stands in direct opposition to this. According to this alternative interpretation, the sovereign individual actually represents a counter-ideal:⁴ something Nietzsche deliberately sets up so as to criticize and displace. Finally, I will then consider the view that I will endorse, namely that the sovereign individual is not a Nietzschean ideal at all (either positive or negative), but is a description of a type of human being that was once, under certain historical conditions, possible, but has since disappeared because of the prevalence of ascetic moral values.⁵

³I say 'explicitly' here because one might think that he is referred to again as the "man of the future" who "will redeem us" is GM II: 24, and perhaps elsewhere. Some people even go so far as to equate the sovereign individual directly with the *Übermensch*. See, for example, May's statement that "the absolutely sovereign individual is, I suggest, none other than the *Übermensch*" (1999, p.117). As this chapter will show, this is not a statement I would agree with.

⁴In one sense this is a slightly misleading term to use given Nietzsche's use of the phrase "*counter-idealists*" (GM III: 24) to describe people who are opposed to a particular ideal. I do, however, give an extended explanation of the sense in which I am using the term on page 17.

⁵These are not the only interpretations of GM II: 2 that one could possibly put forward. One might, for example, take the sovereign individual to be an expression of Nietzsche's hope that the phenomenon of bad conscience might (like all great things) end in its own self-overcoming (cf. GM III: 27). Hence, the sovereign individual is not an ideal to be striven for, but rather

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Due to the dominance in the secondary literature of the first of these readings, I will describe it here only in general terms rather than associating it with any particular commentator. In describing the remaining two views, on the other hand, I will rely upon the accounts offered by Acampora (in “On Sovereignty and Overhumanity: Why It Matters How We Read Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* II: 2”) and Janaway (in *Beyond Selflessness*) for support.

After arguing for this understanding of the significance of the sovereign individual, I will then conclude by reflecting upon what consequences this reading has for the relation between GM II: 2 and Nietzsche’s ideal of autonomy. My argument here will be that the sovereign individual plays a similar role in the Second Essay to that played by the noble in the First Essay. As an example of a healthy type of human being from the past, he naturally draws Nietzsche’s praise when compared with the sick animal man has become. However, as with the noble, the conditions which made this figure possible no longer exist, and Nietzsche is not calling for his reappearance in any simple sense. Instead, he is looking to bring about a type of human being that shares some of the positive features present in the sovereign individual, but that also incorporates the many changes that human beings and human society have undergone since his disappearance. As such, the sovereign individual does not represent a ready-made formula for an autonomous Nietzschean individual of the future, but can only act as a sort of instructive figure from the past—one who provides some clues about what is to be achieved, but tells us significantly less about exactly how to go about achieving it. I will also discuss both the resonances and differences this reading has with the other two interpretations discussed within this chapter.

The Sovereign Individual as a Nietzschean Ideal

In terms of Nietzsche scholarship, the notion that the sovereign individual represents some sort of ideal is the closest thing there is to a received view of the passage. Acampora, in her insightful essay on the topic, describes agreement on this issue as “*nearly* unanimous” (2006, p.147) amongst commentators, listing

a vague (and confusing) wish about the future of mankind. For an excellent treatment of this reading and its difficulties see Ridley (1998, p.142–6).

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only Hatab (1995) as a dissenting voice.⁶ In this section, I will examine the reasons why this received view has found so much support, as well as considering some of the objections that have recently been raised against it.

The Sovereign Individual as a Nietzschean Ideal: For

Perhaps the most obvious reason why the sovereign individual has been taken to be a Nietzschean ideal is the manner in which he is described. Nietzsche summons some of his most flattering language in this passage, and really seems to be trying to gain our allegiance for this figure. The following excerpt provides a good example:

in short, we find a man with his own, independent, enduring will whose *prerogative it is to promise*—and in him a proud consciousness quivering in every muscle of *what* he has finally achieved and incorporated, an actual awareness of power and freedom, a feeling that man in general has reached completion. This man who is now free, who actually *has* the prerogative to promise, this master of the *free* will, this sovereign—how could he remain ignorant of his superiority over everybody who does not have the prerogative to promise or answer to himself, how much trust, fear and respect he arouses—he “*merits*” all three—and how could he, with his self-mastery, not realize that he has necessarily been given mastery over circumstances, over nature and over all creatures with a less enduring and reliable will?

(GM II: 2)

As this passage shows, Nietzsche heaps praise on the sovereign individual at such a rate that it can be difficult to keep up. With such a glowing reference, it is easy to see what the notion of an ideal has been associated with this character.

The exuberant tone of the rhetoric is not the only reason for seeing the sovereign individual as a Nietzschean ideal. One might also cite the fact that he seems to exemplify many qualities that are praised highly elsewhere in Nietzsche's works: self-mastery, a certain hardness towards others, an enduring will,

⁶Although she does mention Loeb's essay, which postdates her own, in a footnote (2006, p.158-9).

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positive attitude towards fate,⁷ etc. This is particularly true when we remember that Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual as being a “man who is now free” and who possesses “the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*” (GM II: 2). These remarks (in conjunction with other passages) can be seen to suggest the presence of a particular view about the nature of freedom and responsibility in Nietzsche’s works, namely that these are not necessarily possessed by all (or even most) human beings, but are complex achievements that must be worked at and developed, and are a matter of degree. Hence, not all fully matured human beings are free and accountable for their deeds, but rather they must (or at least can) become so through imposing unity upon their character across time and overcoming certain internal and external resistances to this goal of autonomous selfhood.⁸ The sovereign individual is then taken to be the ultimate exemplar of this kind of *attained* freedom—a figure who has, through the possession of an enduring will, forged a free and responsible being from the basic materials of his natural self. If all this is correct, then it seems highly plausible that Nietzsche presents the sovereign individual as an ideal for our admiration and emulation.

Further support for this reading can also be found in the relationship Nietzsche seems to maintain as holding between the sovereign individual and morality. Right at the beginning of his sustained exaltation, Nietzsche describes him as “autonomous and supramoral (for ‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive)” (GM II: 2).⁹ This remark has been taken to show that the sovereign individual is somehow beyond the morality of good and evil, and is hence a relatively concrete example of the post-moral phase of mankind which Nietzsche frequently reminds us is, or at least should be, on the way. Moreover, the parenthetical statement is meant to emphasize the fact that the sovereign individual’s autonomy is dependent upon the fact that he has liberated himself

⁷Whether the sovereign individual’s attitude towards fate constitutes *amor fati* is a thorny issue. Generally, I think, it is taken to be so. However, this is not the only position available, and some have questioned the compatibility between the love of fate and mastery of fate. I look at Acampora’s argument to this effect on pages 14–15.

⁸The most famous exponent of such a view, whose treatment of these issues is excellent, is Nehamas (1985). There are plenty of other examples though, such as Gemes (2009), May (2009), Richardson (1996) and Risse (2007).

⁹This quote is from the Kaufmann and Hollingdale translation of the *Genealogy*. All others in this thesis are from Diethel’s more recent translation unless otherwise stated.

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from morality, and hence to highlight the fact that one cannot be autonomous whilst one's actions are determined by the dictates of an external ethical code. If the sovereign individual does represent mankind as liberated from morality, however, then this is another reason for seeing him as the perfect candidate for representing a Nietzschean ideal.

In addition to all this, seeing the sovereign individual as a Nietzschean ideal also can also be linked to some of the remarks Nietzsche makes in his autobiographical work *Ecce Homo*. When describing the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche famously states:

With regard to expression, intention, and the art of surprise, the three essays that make up this *Genealogy* are perhaps the most uncanny things written so far. Dionysus, as is known, is also the god of darkness.—In each case, a beginning that should be deceptive: cool, scientific, even ironic, intentionally foreground, intentionally evasive.

(EH: "Why I Write Such Good Books", GM)

In terms of the Second Essay, it seems as though the sovereign individual must play some part in the "deceptive" nature of its beginning. If not for his brief appearance in GM II: 2 the chronology of the essay would seem far more straightforward, and, in spite of the highly laudatory language used to describe him, he does not explicitly reappear anywhere in the *Genealogy*.¹⁰ Yet, if this is so, the question then becomes: in what sense is this beginning deceptive?

If we accept the notion that the sovereign individual is a Nietzschean ideal, there is a fairly simple answer to this question. This beginning is deceptive in the sense that Nietzsche presents us with an ideal, and then goes on in the rest of the essay to show us just how far we are from actually achieving it. In other words, Nietzsche raises our hopes at the start of the essay by describing the sovereign individual, an example of what higher humanity could be. He then carries on, as Owen describes it, by "pulling the rug from beneath our feet" (2007, p.102) and giving his diagnosis of the *actual* state of contemporary man—as the sick animal, using the means of bad conscience to inflict suffering upon himself.

¹⁰Or indeed anywhere else in the published works.

The Sovereign Individual as a Nietzschean Ideal: Against

These then are the main reasons for seeing the sovereign individual as the representative of a Nietzschean ideal: he is described in glowing terms, he exemplifies many qualities that Nietzsche praises highly elsewhere, he seems to be an instance of an autonomous supramoral man of the future, and seeing him as an ideal allows us a way of understanding the “deceptive” nature of the beginning of the Second Essay. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, some questions have been raised over the soundness of this reading. In this section, I will look at the considerations offered against seeing the sovereign as an ideal in Acampora’s recent essay “On Sovereignty and Overhumanity”.¹¹

I will begin with the most basic reason, as stated by Acampora: “Simply put, there is not enough textual evidence to support the general and oft-repeated claim that the sovereign individual of GM II: 2 is Nietzsche’s ideal type” (2006, p.153). As was mentioned previously, the sovereign individual is only ever explicitly mentioned in one section of the *Genealogy*. If he were an ideal type, we might reasonably expect other descriptions and elucidations to be given elsewhere. Yet, whilst the term ‘sovereign’ is occasionally used in other contexts, there is no further mention of the sovereign individual as such anywhere in the published works. Hence, to take him as Nietzsche’s vision for the future of humanity on the basis of one passage seems a little hasty.

Further questions are also raised by Acampora about the context in which the sovereign individual passage arises, and the talk of memory and forgetting that surrounds it. In the opening section of the Second Essay, during his discussion of the “prerogative to *promise*”, Nietzsche directs our attention to the nature and value of “forgetfulness” (GM II: 1). There are two main points he wants to get across. Firstly, that forgetfulness is “an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word” (GM II: 1) as opposed to a passive inability to remember. Secondly, that this positive capacity of forgetfulness

¹¹I take Acampora as representative here as she is highly influenced by Hatab (1995), and her objections include and expand upon those offered by White (1994). Loeb (2006) offers some alternative considerations against seeing the sovereign as an ideal, but explaining these would involve going deeply into some Zarathustrian ideas (the eternal recurrence, the nature of time as a cause of *ressentiment*) that seem quite distant from the concerns of the Second Essay.

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plays an important role in our psychic health—"there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, *immediacy*, without forgetfulness" (GM II: 1). After establishing these points about forgetfulness, Nietzsche then returns to the issue of promising:

this necessarily forgetful animal [man], in whom forgetting is a strength, representing a form of *robust* health, has bred for himself a counter-device, memory, with the help of which forgetfulness can be suspended in certain cases,—namely in those cases where a promise is to be made: consequently, it is by no means merely a passive inability to be rid of an impression once it has made its impact. . . instead it is an active *desire* not to let go, a desire to keep on desiring what has been, on some occasion, desired, really it is the *will's memory*: so that a world of strange new things, circumstances, and even acts of will may be placed quite safely in between the original "I will", "I shall do" and the actual discharge of the will, its *act*, without breaking this long chain of the will.

(GM II: 1)

As this passage shows, the ability to promise relies upon memory, a "counter-device" that man has developed in order to combat his natural forgetfulness. Moreover, this memory is not to be conceived negatively as a failure of forgetfulness, but is itself also a positive capacity—an active desire to hold on to certain relevant aspects of the past. The sovereign individual then, who is defined by "the prerogative to *promise*" and who upholds his word "in the face of mishap or even 'in the face of fate'" (GM II: 2), seems to represent the pinnacle of this development of memory—a desire to *never*, if possible, fail to see out a desire that has once been desired. Yet, if he is a Nietzschean ideal, and he does have such a highly developed memory, then it is difficult to understand why Nietzsche goes out of his way to remind us of the virtues of active forgetfulness. To put it another way, if Nietzsche thinks that forgetfulness is so important for the healthy functioning of human beings, as GM II: 1 (and other passages¹²) seem to suggest, then why does he idealize a figure characterized by his highly developed memory, such as the sovereign individual?¹³

¹²The first section of *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (The second of the *Untimely Meditations*) provides a particularly good example.

¹³The mnemonic ability of the sovereign is also at the root of Loeb's objections to placing

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Difficulties also arise when we consider the compatibility of the sovereign individual with another of Nietzsche's major ideas, *amor fati*. The notion of *amor fati* first appears in Book Four of *The Gay Science*,¹⁴ and remains prominent (and perhaps even gains prominence) through the rest of Nietzsche's life. Put briefly (or rather, merely translated), *amor fati* means the love of fate. Nietzsche usually fills out this enigmatic slogan with the idea of not merely bearing or accepting the necessary aspects of one's life, but actually being so positively disposed towards them so as to love them, for the role they play in making one who one is. When the sovereign individual is described, however, there are several indications that his comportment to his destiny does not constitute *amor fati*. We are told, for instance, that he is "strong enough to remain upright in the face of mishap or even 'in the face of fate'". We are also told that he has a "consciousness of this rare freedom and power over himself and his destiny" (GM II: 2). Given these remarks, it seems that the sovereign individual displays a desire to control or master fate, rather than an acceptance and love of that which is necessary. Here is how Acampora puts the point:

Committing oneself to conquering fate, which the sovereign individual of GM II: 2 does as part of taking responsibility for the promises he makes, would seem to stand in the way of, would specifically bind one to an idea that would prevent one from, loving one's fate.

(Acampora, 2006, p.152)

Hence, as Acampora sees it, the sovereign individual's desire to fulfil his promises excludes him from the possibility of loving his fate. If this is correct, however, then his status as an ideal is certainly thrown into doubt. For if Nietzsche can only consistently be promoting one of these two ideals (i.e. sovereignty or *amor fati*) then the weight of textual evidence would definitely seem to decide this debate in favour of *amor fati*.

this figure at the core of Nietzsche's positive vision. According to Loeb (2006), the memory developed by mankind (and dramatized in the figure of the sovereign individual) is what fixes man's past as a "that which was" (2006, p.165) and prevents him from seeing the truth of the eternal recurrence.

¹⁴In the opening section (276), to be specific.

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In addition to these first three points, Acampora also makes a further objection to the received view, which raises questions over the relationship between the description we are given of the sovereign individual in GM II: 2 and many of the critical remarks Nietzsche makes elsewhere. According to Acampora, seeing the sovereign individual as Nietzsche's ideal type "requires committing him [Nietzsche] to affirming other ideas, particularly about the nature of human subjectivity, which he clearly finds problematic" (2006, p.152). As is well known, Nietzsche attacks many of the ideas that have held sway in the philosophical tradition. Hence, some of the phrases used in the description of the sovereign individual may seem surprising to those more used to Nietzsche's critical tirades. He is described, for instance, as a "master of the *free* will" and "The 'free' man" (GM II: 2), in spite of Nietzsche's many denials of the existence of free will.¹⁵ He is also described as possessing "the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*", even though Nietzsche elsewhere claims that it is only error which makes us believe that people are accountable for their actions.¹⁶

Foremost amongst these inconsistencies, at least in Acampora's eyes, is that between the sovereign individual's distinctive activity (promising) and Nietzsche's usual account of the human subject. As Nietzsche himself points out, making a promise (or a sincere one, at least) involves a "degree of control over the future" (GM II: 1). More specifically, the person making the promise must be capable of ensuring, exceptional circumstances notwithstanding, that their future self will act upon their present desire and hence fulfil their promise. This presupposes a level of duration and unity to the self that is sharply at odds with the vast majority of Nietzsche's writings on the issue. Here is how Acampora states the puzzle:

how could it be that the Nietzsche who so emphasizes *becoming*, and who is suspicious of the concept of the subject (as the "doer behind the deed"), could

¹⁵For some examples of Nietzsche's claims specifically about free will, see A 14, 15 and 38, BGE 21, EH: "Why I am so Wise", 6 and TI: "The Four Great Errors", 7.

¹⁶This sort of view is particularly prevalent around the time of *Human, All Too Human*, when Nietzsche was developing his intellectual friendship with Paul Rée. See sections 39, 91, and 105-7 for good examples. It can also be found, although with much less frequency, in the later works. See, for example, the whole of "The Four Great Errors" section of *Twilight of the Idols*.

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think that it is desirable—let alone *possible*—that a person could *ensure* his or her word in the future?

(Acampora, 2006, p.153)

Put crudely: how can Nietzsche be recommending the ideal of the sovereign individual when he believes that there are no stable individuals but only collections of disparate, and typically conflicting, drives and affects?

The Sovereign Individual as a Nietzschean Counter-Ideal

Up to this point I have described the reasons both for and against the typical understanding of the sovereign individual passage. I will now move on to looking at one of the opposing theories which claims that the sovereign individual is not Nietzsche's ideal type, but actually represents a counter-ideal.

To begin with, it is worth getting clear about exactly what is meant by this in this context. To say that Nietzsche presents the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal is not to say that he simply intends for his readers to react negatively to this figure. Rather, it means that he describes the sovereign individual *as if* he were describing an ideal type, but with the overall intention of undermining and critiquing the very values inherent in the ideal this figure represents. Put another way, this reading claims that Nietzsche intends his readers to be drawn to the figure of the sovereign individual when he is first described, but that by the end of the Second Essay he hopes to have shown that the ideal that is being represented here is both incoherent and potentially harmful to its followers.

What ideal, then, does the sovereign individual represent if not Nietzsche's own? To answer this question, it may be useful to look again at the notion of a counter-ideal. In order for the presentation of a counter-ideal to be worthwhile, the values one is trying to undermine must already have (or at least be likely to acquire) adherents. After all, why criticize an ideal that nobody currently does, or is ever likely to, believe in? Nietzsche's counter-ideal is no different,

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according to this interpretation, and targets an ideal already held by many of his contemporaries. Hatab dubs this “the modernist ideal of subjective autonomy” (1995, p.37), and it roughly amounts to the desire to possess a sort of *absolute* responsibility for one’s actions—a responsibility so absolute that one recognizes no mitigating factors in the explanation and causes of one’s behaviour (such as circumstance or the influence of one’s past), but believes oneself to bear the sole accountability. In other words, it is the ardent belief that one’s actions arise in an entirely undetermined fashion from one’s own neutral free will.

If this understanding is correct, it also makes room for an interesting link to be made between GM II: 2 and Nietzsche’s oft-discussed attack on the notion of free will in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here (BGE 21), after rejecting both “free will” and “un-free will” as misconceived concepts, Nietzsche goes on to identify two different types of person who, for “profoundly *personal*” reasons, reject the idea of un-free will. The sovereign individual, if he were a counter-ideal, would now become aligned with the first of these two types that Nietzsche mentions, namely those who “would never dream of relinquishing their ‘responsibility’, a belief in *themselves*, a personal right to *their own* merit” (also, note the similarity of language used). Hence, far from being an ideal that Nietzsche himself endorses, the sovereign individual is more akin to the ideal of the man who suffers from “the longing to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for [his] actions [himself] and to relieve God, world, ancestors, chance and society of the burden”.

We now have a fuller picture of the opposing theory: the sovereign individual is not a faithful representation of Nietzsche’s own values, but an attempt to create a character who exemplifies the modern ideal of absolute responsibility, an ideal which Nietzsche wishes to criticize and replace. In the remainder of this section I will put forward some of the considerations for and against this position.

The Sovereign Individual as a Nietzschean Counter-Ideal: For

As might well be expected, there is not a lot of extra textual evidence that can be used to support the claim that the sovereign individual is a counter-ideal. It

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has already been mentioned that the only direct evidence comes from GM II: 2, so the case for this view is not going to rely on unearthing new passages in which Nietzsche is explicitly anti-sovereignty. Instead, the claim is essentially that this interpretation possesses the greater explanatory power. If we accept the received view, we must find answers to the objections listed above.¹⁷ The reading that understands the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal, by contrast, is supposedly capable of explaining (almost¹⁸) all of the features of the passage emphasized by the received view, as well as being able to account for all of the objections that have been raised against it. Stated so briefly this claim sounds a little bold, so I will now go on to unpack it.

Firstly, and perhaps also most obviously, the notion that the sovereign individual is a counter-ideal is able to accommodate both the glowing language in which he is described, as well as the fact that he seems to be depicted as some sort of man of the future, liberated from morality. As was mentioned in the previous section, presenting something as a counter-ideal involves, initially at least, putting it forward *as if* it were an ideal one genuinely believed. Therefore we should not be surprised to see Nietzsche attaching so many superlatives to the sovereign individual, or associating him with so many positive ideas. After all, his overall intention is to raise (or perhaps awaken) our allegiance to this figure to the highest level possible, in order for his genealogical undermining to have the greatest effect.

This counter-ideal structure is also capable of explaining why Nietzsche says the beginning of the Second Essay “*should* be deceptive”. In fact, it is perhaps even better equipped to do so. According to the standard interpretation, to recap, the beginning of this essay is deceptive because Nietzsche presents us his ideal, but then goes on to show how far most (if not all) modern Europeans are from actually achieving it. In short, he deliberately raises our hopes, only to then go on and dash them. If we accept the claim that the sovereign individual

¹⁷This is not to say that this cannot be done. Some suggestions along these lines are considered later in this chapter.

¹⁸I say ‘almost’ here because there is one major point of difference between the two interpretations (aside from the attitude towards the sovereign individual they attribute to Nietzsche): they differ over whether the sovereign individual clashes with or ties into the major themes of Nietzsche’s works.

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is a counter-ideal, on the other hand, there is a much stronger sense in which the beginning to this essay is deceptive. Rather than merely being a device intended to raise our hopes, the sovereign individual now becomes part of an elaborately misleading introduction, designed to trick Nietzsche's readers into the (false) belief that he shares and supports the modern ideal of absolute responsibility. Hence, instead of presenting his values genuinely but withholding how far we are from realizing them (as the standard interpretation would have it), Nietzsche is actually being a lot more deceitful. He never *actually* endorses the ideal of free will and autonomy seemingly put forward in GM II: 2, but only appears to do so in order to heighten the feeling for this ideal in his readers.

So far in this section I have shown how understanding the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal can account for some¹⁹ of the features of the passage highlighted in favour of the traditional interpretation. However, if this theory really does possess more explanatory power than its competitor, then we should expect it to be able to survive (and ideally explain and incorporate) at least some of the objections that have been brought against the received view. I will now explain how it attempts to do so.

Firstly, this interpretation can quite easily explain the fact that the sovereign individual only ever makes one appearance in Nietzsche's works. As a counter-ideal, his usefulness is limited to his deceptive role in the Second Essay, and there would be no need for Nietzsche to ever mention him again unless he wanted to try and play exactly the same trick on his readers twice.

Secondly, this reading is also capable of accounting for the seeming inconsistencies between the passage in question and other major aspects of Nietzsche's thought noted earlier (i.e. his recommendation of *amor fati* and his critical attitudes towards notions such as free will and the stable human subject). If the sovereign individual is the representative of an ideal Nietzsche only ever intends to undermine, then there is no reason to suppose that he would fit well with Nietzsche's pronouncements on other issues. In fact, to the contrary, we would fully expect the distinguishing features of the sovereign individual to embody the sort of conceptual errors that Nietzsche frequently diagnoses in the philosophical thinking of modern man. After all, it is the prevalence and harmfulness

¹⁹See previous footnote.

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of these errors, according to this interpretation, that motivates his attack on this ideal.

Finally, this way of understanding the sovereign individual passage can also help make sense of Nietzsche's motivations for placing it alongside his discussion of memory and forgetfulness. As was mentioned on pages 13–14, one difficulty facing the standard interpretation is that it must account for the seeming discrepancy between the sovereign individual's highly developed memory and the praise which Nietzsche lavishes on the positive capacity of forgetfulness. If we accept the counter-ideal reading, on the other hand, then there is no discrepancy here at all. The sovereign individual is not a figure Nietzsche wants us to imitate, and the unhealthy degree to which his memory needs to be developed is merely another reason why Nietzsche disapproves of the ideal he represents.

Moreover, this interpretation also allows for a new way of looking at the overall message of the Second Essay which gives a far more prominent role to Nietzsche's discussion of memory and forgetting than is usually supposed. Here is Acampora's most crisp statement of the idea:

The task of GM II is to offer an account of how the *Kraft*²⁰ of remembering accomplished its victory, and to chart the deleterious effects of the atrophy of forgetting in the course of human development.

(Acampora, 2006, p.149)

If we accept the view that the sovereign individual is a counter-ideal, therefore, Nietzsche's remarks about memory and forgetfulness become far more than throwaway comments made at the beginning of the Second Essay. In fact, these statements now act as a sort of scene setting for the whole piece, where Nietzsche issues a warning to us about the importance of active forgetfulness for a healthy human existence. The rest of the essay, on this reading, then serves as an investigation into the negative consequences that human beings have had to suffer for over-developing their memory in the pursuit of this ideal of subjective autonomy: consequences such as guilt, bad conscience, and the whole machinery of "self-crucifixion and self-abuse" in which "Europe excelled during the last millennia" (GM II: 23).

²⁰Power or force.

The Sovereign Individual as a Nietzschean Counter-Ideal: Against

In the previous section, I examined some of the reasons that might be put forward in favour of seeing the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal. More specifically, I attempted to show why one might believe that this interpretation possesses greater explanatory power than the received view, and hence provides a more satisfying reading of the passage in question. In this section, I will now consider some objections that could be made over the plausibility of this alternative stance.

The first such objection centres around the obvious elitism that is present in this ideal. Throughout the passage in question, Nietzsche makes frequent reference to the superiority the sovereign individual does (and should) feel over all those who do not have the prerogative to promise. Hence, we are told, his dealings with others will be markedly different depending on whether or not these others are also sovereign individuals. If they are, he will “necessarily” treat them with “respect” (GM II: 2). Those who are not, by contrast, will be in for some quite different treatment:

he will necessarily be ready to kick the febrile whippets who promise without that prerogative, and will save the rod for the liar who breaks his word in the very moment it passes his lips.

(GM II: 2)

These remarks seem to imply that sovereign individuals constitute only a certain section of society, and that they will frequently have to deal with (and guard themselves against) people who simply do not have the same kind of self-control as they do. This point is then reinforced by Nietzsche's description of the sovereign individual's responsibility as an “extraordinary privilege”, presumably possessed only by a select few. If all this is correct, then it should make us suspicious of the claim that what is being presented here is the “modernist ideal of subjective autonomy”. For it is surely one of the basic premises of this ideal that nearly all human beings are responsible for their actions, in virtue of

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being rational subjects with free will.²¹ The ideal represented by the sovereign individual, by contrast, differs greatly from this Kantian-style outlook by seeing freedom as only being possessed by a certain higher portion of mankind. Moreover, it also seems to involve a vastly different conception of how human beings should be treated. According to most understandings of the “modernist ideal of subjective autonomy”, all human beings are worthy of respect and equal treatment.²² In the description Nietzsche offers us, on the other hand, we are told that sovereign individuals will only respect other sovereign individuals, and will seemingly not be gentle in their treatment of those who they take to be below themselves.

A second reason for questioning this alternative reading is that it seems to rely on somewhat overstating the scope of the critical side of Nietzsche’s project. As was noted previously, one of the major motivations for seeing the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal is the seeming inconsistency between the descriptions Nietzsche gives us in GM II: 2 and the critical remarks that can be found in the rest of his corpus. The fact that he attributes both freedom and responsibility to the sovereign individual, for example, seems to be at odds with the critical stance he often takes towards these notions elsewhere in his works. Hence, according to the counter-ideal reading, Nietzsche cannot be writing completely truthfully in his account of the sovereign individual. To take this view, however, one must assume that Nietzsche only ever takes a sceptical stance with regards to such traditional philosophical concepts such as freedom, selfhood, and responsibility. Yet, if we look more closely at the textual evidence, we find that his views are actually more complex. Whilst it is true that he frequently brings objections against these notions, he also has a more revisionary side to his thought. In this less critical mood, he is happy to allow for the possibility of new and, in his eyes at least, improved versions of the concepts he ordinarily attacks. Therefore, we cannot conclude solely from the fact that he is employing certain concepts (such as freedom, autonomy, etc.) that he cannot be writing in earnest. This point can be best shown through examples.

²¹Excepting perhaps children and people whose cognitive faculties are limited in certain ways.

²²Kant’s famous statement of the idea comes in Section II of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (1997, p.38).

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As the first example, I will look at what Acampora takes to be the most glaring inconsistency between the sovereign individual passage and the rest of Nietzsche's works, namely the position advanced within it on the nature of human subjectivity. As Acampora understands things, to recap, the sovereign individual's capacity to promise presupposes a degree of personal stability which cannot be reconciled with Nietzsche's radically sceptical views on the nature of the self. To take this position, however, involves ignoring most (if not all) of the subtleties of Nietzsche's view on this difficult topic. The following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* provides a good example:

First of all, we must also put an end to that other and more disastrous atomism, the one Christianity has taught best and longest, the *atomism of the soul*. Let this expression signify the belief that the soul is something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, that it is a monad, an *atomon*: this belief must be thrown out of science! Between you and me, there is absolutely no need to give up "the soul" itself, and relinquish one of the oldest and most venerable hypothesis—and concepts like "mortal soul" and the "soul as subject-multiplicity" and the "soul as a society constructed out of drives and affects" want henceforth to have civil rights in the realm of science.

(BGE 12)

As this passage shows, Nietzsche does not totally deny the existence of any sort of human "soul" (or self). Instead, his objection is towards certain conceptions of the self—those that understand the human subject as some sort of single, simple, indestructible and eternal entity that each person possesses. The fact that he rejects this particular historical conception of the self, however, should not be equated with an outright denial of the existence of any sort of sustained selfhood for human beings whatsoever. Rather, as the quote above shows, it simply means that any concept of selfhood that is at work in Nietzsche's writings will have to meet certain conditions: it will have to recognize (at least) the multiplicity, complexity, and mortality of any human subject. This, however, is exactly the sort of conception of selfhood that does underpin all of Nietzsche's discussions of the psychological origins of certain beliefs, as well as his frequent talk of self-creation. Hence, the mere fact that Nietzsche attributes some degree

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of stable subjectivity to the sovereign individual does not automatically mean that he is not compatible with Nietzsche's other pronouncements.

A similar treatment can also be given to the issue of freedom. Just as with his claims about the nature of the self, Nietzsche's frequent critiques of the notion of free will could be seen as conflicting with the fact that he describes the sovereign individual as a "man who is now free" and a "master of the *free* will". This, however, would be to once again ignore the many positive uses to which Nietzsche puts the notion of freedom. Take, for example, the following famous passage on Goethe from *Twilight of the Idols*:

Goethe conceived of a strong, highly educated, self-respecting human being, skilled in all things physical and able to keep himself in check, who could dare to allow himself the entire expanse and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom. . . A spirit like this who has *become free* stands in the middle of the world with a cheerful and trusting fatalism in the *belief* that only the individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—*he does not negate any more*. . . But a belief like this is the highest of all possible beliefs: I have christened it with the name *Dionysus*.—

(TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 49)

Here, Nietzsche once again describes for us a man who "has *become free*" and "who is strong enough for this freedom". And, whilst there may be doubts about Nietzsche's seriousness in employing the notion of freedom with regard to the sovereign individual, the same thing cannot really be said in this connection. Here, Nietzsche associates the notion of freedom with two figures (Goethe and Dionysus) that get nothing but a positive treatment throughout his writings. Moreover, he also links freedom here with the notion of affirmation—one of the central positive themes of all his writings from *The Gay Science* onwards. Hence, the mere fact that Nietzsche talks about freedom cannot be taken as a guarantee that we should be looking for some sort of hidden or disguised meaning.

Finally, seeing the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal also sits rather uneasily with the chronology of the Second Essay. Throughout GM II: 2 there are frequent references to the fact that the sovereign individual comes after, and in-

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deed is produced by, what Nietzsche calls “the morality of custom”. The morality of custom, however, occupies a quite specific place in history for Nietzsche. This is shown by his description of it as “the actual labour of man on himself during the longest epoch of the human race, his whole *prehistoric* labour” (GM II: 2). Hence, it would seem strange if Nietzsche believed that the sovereign individual could represent the “modernist ideal of subjective autonomy” whilst also believing him to have been made possible by a style of morality that existed exclusively during mankind’s prehistory.

This last objection also applies equally well to the standard interpretation of the passage, which sees the sovereign individual as some sort of future figure, whose freedom and autonomy is dependent upon his liberation from morality. In the case of both of these readings, it seems that misleading translations may play some part in the problem. I am thinking here of one particular part of the sovereign individual passage, which normally gets translated along these lines:

If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal what they have simply been the means to: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the sovereign individual, like only to himself, liberated again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for autonomous and moral are mutually exclusive)²³

(GM II: 2)

Despite there being two separate indications that it is specifically the morality of custom that is presently under discussion, people seem to have taken more notice of the last of the few words reproduced here, which strongly imply that the sovereign individual is somehow beyond morality as such—hence making him a perfect candidate for the status of a Nietzschean future ideal. Yet, if we look at the original German text, it is clear that this was not what Nietzsche was intending to imply. Before quoting this text, however, it will be useful to

²³I am here using Kaufmann and Hollingdale’s translation (Nietzsche, 1996), because their translation of ‘*sittlich*’ by the word ‘moral’ suits my purposes particularly well. Diethe’s translation however, which uses ‘ethical’ instead, is in many ways just as misleading, mainly due to the ethics/morality distinction that has been applied to Nietzsche’s thought most notably by Clark (2001). I will discuss this distinction in more detail in the next chapter.

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give some preliminary explanation. When talking about morality, Nietzsche most commonly uses the word ‘*Moral*’—as in the German title of the book *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. The phrase ‘morality of custom’, on the other hand, translates the German phrase ‘*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*’. Bearing this in mind, I will now give the original German text from which the words “autonomous and supramoral (for ‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive)” are translated:

das autonome übersittliche Individuum (denn »autonom« und »sittlich« schliesst sich aus)

(Nietzsche, 1988, p.48)

As this shows, even in these remarks Nietzsche is clearly only intending to convey to us that the sovereign individual is supra-the-morality-of-custom (i.e. *übersittliche*), and that his autonomy is merely dependent upon his liberation from a morality which existed exclusively during mankind’s prehistory. In fact, Nietzsche does not even use the German word ‘*Moral*’ once throughout the whole of GM II: 2. Hence both of the views that have been discussed so far, which share the assumption that the sovereign individual is primarily an ideal relevant for either modern or future times, seem to involve ignoring the very specific place in history that Nietzsche attributes to this figure.

The Sovereign Individual as a Figure from the Past

So far in this chapter I have considered reasons both for and against two different interpretations of the role the sovereign individual plays within Nietzsche’s thought. I will now look at a third possible reading which, I shall argue, avoids the problems that these other reading face, as well as cohering better with many of Nietzsche’s other remarks in the Second Essay.

The main claim of this third reading, then, is that the sovereign individual is not an ideal that Nietzsche (or indeed anyone else) is proposing for the future of mankind. Instead, he is actually a figure that existed at a certain point in mankind’s history, but has since become, for various reasons, impossible. As

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such, his role can only be understood in relation to what Janaway has called the “fall and redemption pattern” (2007, p.117) of the Second Essay.²⁴ Here is a precise summary:

at some time in the past, as a product of the harshly repressive “morality of custom”, there became possible sovereign individuals with a free will. Since that time the post-Christian morality of selflessness has been victorious, posing the desirability of guilt and self-suppression and the conception of the non-self-suppressing individual as blameworthy for not making the supposedly available choice to be harmless. In some future we might cast off this conception of morality, and the will could be free again.

(Janaway, 2007, p.117)

This represents the bare bones of the reading in question. In this section and the next, I will go into more detail about exactly how this “fall and redemption pattern” works, as well as showing how it avoids the difficulties faced by the two interpretations that have already been discussed.

The first important stage of this “fall and redemption pattern”, then, is actually that which precedes the fall—the creation of sovereign individuals by the “harshly repressive” morality of custom. As was mentioned in the previous section, Nietzsche makes frequent references to the fact that the “free will” possessed by the sovereign individual is made possible by the morality of custom. The question now becomes: how? To answer this, we must look at Nietzsche’s analysis of what this morality actually entails. The idea of the morality of custom is first introduced in *Daybreak*.²⁵ Here, Nietzsche describes this morality as being characterized by a blind and superstitious obedience to tradition. Unlike other forms of ethical orientation, the morality of custom is not, in the eyes of its adherents at least, susceptible to justification and rationalization. Rather, those individuals living under its dictates obey tradition simply “because it *commands*” (D 9) and see no practical utility for themselves in doing so, except perhaps in avoiding the wrath of the many vengeful and elusive spirits which

²⁴It should be noted that Janaway does not argue directly for this reading, but rather considers it as one of the many possible interpretations that could be given of the passage.

²⁵D 9—one of the passages Nietzsche refers us to in GM II: 2.

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they take to populate their primitive world. Moreover, and as Nietzsche is particularly fond of emphasizing in the *Genealogy*, the rules that the morality of custom lays down are enforced through particularly harsh punishments, in order to impress the need to obey most forcefully on the collection of “slaves of the mood and desire of the moment” (GM II: 3) that constitute its subjects.

As Nietzsche himself points out, there is much “hardness, tyranny, stupidity and idiocy” (GM II: 2) contained in such a morality. Yet, in spite of this, it also serves a useful purpose: it provides a training in obedience *as such*. It is this training which makes sovereign individuals possible. After learning obedience in relation to arbitrary and tyrannical laws, human beings then become capable of obeying laws that they set for themselves. This ability to fully obey laws that the person in question somehow identifies with, has internalized, and sees as being somehow expressive of their own nature is what Nietzsche understands by the possession of conscience in its earliest stages, and it is the possession of this sort of conscience as a “dominant instinct” (GM II: 2) which then characterizes the sovereign individual.

It is for this reason that Nietzsche thinks that human beings only become fully free, autonomous, and responsible once they have transcended the morality of custom. Whilst they are still under the sway of this ethical system, their actions are dictated entirely by what tradition demands. After the development of conscience, by contrast, people become capable of directing their actions according to their own ends and values, and hence are truly in control of their own actions for the first time. Moreover, the possession of this “dominant instinct” also acts to unify the disparate drives of the individuals in which it is found. This is because, due to its ‘dominant’ nature, all other drives must find a function in relation to its ends, or else risk being suppressed until they essentially lose their force and power.

It is also worth noting that, at this stage of its development, according to Nietzsche, conscience is best described as an instinct. This is shown by the closing sentences of the passage:

The proud knowledge of this extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare power over himself and his destiny, has penetrated him to his lowest depths and become an instinct, his dominant instinct:—what will he

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call his dominant instinct, assuming that he needs a word for it? No doubt about the answer: this sovereign human being calls it his *conscience*...

(GM II: 2)

Here, we meet for the first time with one of Nietzsche's potentially confusing uses of the notion of instinct. This is an issue that will be returned to in greater detail in Chapter IV,²⁶ so I will not go into great detail here. Suffice it to say for the time being though, that I think Nietzsche is using this term in order to bring out certain features of the way conscience functions in the individual who possesses it. The qualities he is primarily trying to signal are not, however, those that we would ordinarily associate with the idea of instinct—being inborn as opposed to learnt, for example, or being some sort of automatic reaction.²⁷ Rather, his point is to emphasize that conscience in this phase of its development does not present its demands as rational considerations for the assent of the conscious intellect, but rather commands authoritatively as if from deep within.

This, however, is not where the story of the Second Essay ends. Once conscience has developed it does not simply continue to be an unconscious regulating faculty within the human individual. Instead, according to the account Nietzsche gives, conscience becomes intertwined with notions such as guilt and self-denial, and ultimately transforms into what he dubs “bad conscience” (GM II: 4)—a desire to understand one's self as guilty and worthy of punishment. As might be expected from a writer as complex as Nietzsche, the reasons behind this transformation are many and intricate. The reason to which he devotes the most space within the context of the Second Essay, however, is the fact that the necessities of social living force human beings to impose constraints upon many of their naturally aggressive desires (through such measures as codes of laws and associated punishments). These aggressive desires do not simply disappear, however, and it becomes necessary for people to find alternative ways of expressing their natural need to inflict cruelty and suffering. Barred from external expression, these impulses turn back on the very people who hold them, and seize

²⁶More specifically, on pages 131–136.

²⁷Although he may possibly be intending to imply these things as well.

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upon bad conscience as a way of making themselves suffer as a compensation for the more natural external outlet that is no longer available to them.

In one sense, it may look as if something does not add up about this account. This is because it seems to posit the same phenomenon—i.e. socialization—as the cause of both conscience and bad conscience. If bad conscience is caused by the suppression of natural instincts necessary for communal living, why does the morality of custom, which seems to involve a similar sort of suppression, give rise to the more positive form of conscience that Nietzsche describes in GM II: 2 and not to its unpleasant counterpart? This is, however, only a seeming inconsistency, and there are two significant differences between the morality of custom and later ethical systems which account for the differences in the results they produce.

The first difference is in the types of values that inform the two systems. As was mentioned earlier, the rules laid down by the morality of custom are arbitrary and handed down through tradition. As such, they do not specifically target man's aggressive impulses in the same way that later, more humane ethical systems do. Therefore, it is not inconceivable that certain rules put forward by the morality of custom would actually *require* engaging one's aggressive instincts in order to obey them: rules often attributed to primitive societies such as sacrifices or ritualistic ways of taking revenge on those who have wronged you might, for example, fall in to such a category. Hence, whilst the morality of custom does involve the suppression of desires, it still allows for the venting of some aggressive impulses, and does not force man to turn these against himself to nearly the same degree.

Secondly, there is also a difference in scope between the two ethical systems, in the sense of the number of people whom you must regard as members of your social group, and hence extend ethical treatment to. Whilst the timeline of the *Genealogy* is not uncontroversial, it seems safe to assume that the morality of custom held sway whilst human society was still, in Nietzsche's words, "shapeless and shifting" (GM II: 17), and people still lived in relatively small tribal groups, each with its own different sets of traditions and customs. As such, these human beings were still "happily adapted to the wilderness, war, the wandering life and adventure" (GM II: 16), and treated other tribal groups in the

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essentially aggressive fashion that this style of living demands. Hence, as with the nobles of the First Essay, there is still plenty of opportunity for those living under the morality of custom to “compensate for tension which is caused by being closed in and fenced in by the peace of the community” by going “outside” into the “wilderness” (GM I: 11). At a certain point, however, according to the story Nietzsche tells, there is a radical and sudden change in the life of these people: a “pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race” (GM II: 17) imposes a state upon them.²⁸ After this has occurred, the boundaries of the ethical community are extended vastly. Suddenly, virtually nobody one comes into contact with on anything like a regular basis is a legitimate target for aggressive impulses, and man “finally [finds] himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace” (GM II: 16)—unable to express any of his natural aggressive desires externally. It is this “most fundamental of all changes” (GM II: 16) from nomadic groups to organized states that partly marks the difference between the morality of custom and later ethical systems, and helps to explain why bad conscience arises from one and not the other.

All of this described above is obviously a highly truncated version of the story Nietzsche tells, and there are many other factors that feed in to the transformation of conscience into bad conscience. The important point here, however, is that once this transformation has occurred conscience can no longer perform the function that it once did. Instead of being a ruling instinct which allows people to impose a unity on their actions across time in accordance with their own values, it becomes an instrument for self-cruelty and self-hatred. As such, it no longer enables freedom and responsibility in those who possess it, but rather contributes to the loss of these very qualities. This is because it no longer acts as a force to unify the individuals it is found in, but instead heightens the internal conflict of “an animal soul turning against itself” (GM II: 16), and hence furthers the dissolution of the self into many selves. Once this has occurred, however, sovereign individuals (and the type of freedom they possess) are no longer possible.

This transformation of conscience into bad conscience constitutes the “fall”

²⁸Whilst it might be intuitive to assume that this change occurred gradually, Nietzsche is insistent that it was in fact a highly sudden transition (cf. GM II: 17).

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aspect of this “fall and redemption” pattern—the loss of the freedom and responsibility that was once possible. Nietzsche’s message does not end here, however, and he also hopes that “redemption” might be available at some future time. This is most clearly shown in the latter sections of the Second Essay (GM II: 24–5), where Nietzsche talks of a “man of the future” who will overcome the ideal of self-hatred which bad conscience has given rise to:

This man of the future will redeem us, not just from the ideal held up till now, but also from those things *which had to arise from it*, from the great nausea, the will to nothingness, from nihilism, that stroke of midday and of great decision that makes the will free again, which gives earth its purpose and man his hope again, this Antichrist and anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and nothingness—*he must come one day...*

(GM II: 24)

As this passage clearly shows, Nietzsche holds high hopes that mankind, or at least some men, will be liberated from bad conscience at some point in the future. What is particularly interesting to note in terms of the “fall and redemption” reading under discussion, however, is Nietzsche’s talk of the making “the will free *again*”.²⁹ This implies two beliefs on Nietzsche’s part. Firstly, that the will was free at some point in the past. Secondly, that the will is no longer free. Given that Nietzsche holds these beliefs, it seems obvious that the Second Essay must follow something along the lines of the “fall and redemption pattern” being described here. Moreover, given the observations that have already been made about the historical location of the sovereign individual (i.e. his existence directly after or during the latter stages of the prehistoric morality of custom), along with the fact that he is described as a “master of the *free* will”, it also seems fairly safe to conclude that the sovereign individual is not an ideal which Nietzsche is proposing, but is rather a figure from some time in the past—from the previous point in history when the will was free for the first time.

²⁹Emphasis added.

The Sovereign Individual as a Figure from the Past: For

I have now outlined the fundamentals of the “fall and redemption” reading of the Second Essay, as well as the role which the sovereign individual plays within it: the Second Essay tells the story of how mankind achieved freedom through the morality of custom, lost it through his involvement with bad conscience, and must now cast off the shackles of self-hatred which divide him against himself in order to become free again. The role of the sovereign individual passage in all of this, to reiterate, is to provide a dramatized picture of the type of free human being who was once possible before conscience was corrupted and transformed into bad conscience. In the remainder of this section, I will go on to show how this reading can both account for (most of³⁰) the evidence in favour of the two readings I have already discussed, as well as overcoming the problems that they faced.

Firstly, and as with both of the two previous interpretations, this reading can easily explain why Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual in such flattering terms. Given Nietzsche's desire to see “great health” (GM II: 24) restored to humanity, it is not at all surprising that he displays admiration and wonder at this example of healthy humanity that he believes himself to have located in the distant past. Hence, we should not be surprised to see his rhetoric reaching up to such dizzying heights of adulation.

Secondly, this reading can also account for the fact that the sovereign individual is only ever discussed fully in one passage. Much as with the counter-ideal reading, this interpretation assigns a very specific role to this figure within the story of the Second Essay. Therefore, there would be no need for Nietzsche to discuss him anywhere else unless he was going to undertake another in-depth

³⁰I say ‘most of’ here because it cannot account for the fact (used mainly in support of the standard reading) that the sovereign individual is seemingly portrayed as a figure from the future, liberated from morality. If my argument is correct, however, this actually counts in favour of this reading, because the assumption that the sovereign individual is figure from the future relies on a mistranslation of the passage in question. Similarly, it also cannot explain the fact (used in support of the counter-ideal reading) that this passage might be taken to clash with Nietzsche's critical stance towards notions such as freedom and selfhood. Once again, however, this does not count against this reading because, I argue, taking this stance relies upon overstating the critical side of Nietzsche's project. For a fuller treatment of both of these issues see the previous section of this chapter.

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analysis of the transformation of the conscience into bad conscience.

This “fall and redemption” reading can also offer an explanation of Nietzsche’s motivations for claiming in *Ecce Homo* that the beginning of the Second Essay “*should* be deceptive”. Undoubtedly, part of the reason lies in that given by the standard interpretation: Nietzsche wants us to identify with the sovereign individual when he is first described, but intends to make us realize that we are far more similar to the man of bad conscience described later in the essay. However, there is also slightly more to it than this. By placing the sovereign individual in the distant past, Nietzsche is also using this beginning to challenge another common assumption which comes under fire frequently in the *Genealogy*—namely that human history represents any sort of teleological process of improvement (cf. GM I: 11–2 and GM II: 12 in particular). Hence, not only is Nietzsche using this beginning to make us aware of just how far we are from achieving freedom and autonomy, he is also using it to show that, contrary to most people’s beliefs, we are actually much further from achieving it than people who existed long ago, and to whom we generally consider ourselves vastly superior.

Another advantage of this interpretation is that it avoids the difficult question of whether the sovereign individual’s attitude towards fate can be made consistent with Nietzsche’s doctrine of *amor fati*. As was discussed previously, the sovereign individual displays a desire to control fate which seems at odds with Nietzsche’s frequent recommendations that we should love that which is necessary. If he is a figure from the past, as opposed to any sort of future ideal, then his compatibility with this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought is no longer an issue. As Nietzsche is not recommending that we emulate this figure in any strict sense, there is no need to ensure that he can be made compatible with all of Nietzsche’s other positive remarks.³¹ Hence, even if it could be shown conclusively that his attitude towards his destiny contradicts the stipulations laid down by *amor fati*, this would still not exclude him from playing the role he is intended to within the framework of the Second Essay.

³¹Although given the experimental nature of Nietzsche’s positive philosophy this might be too great a demand to make upon any interpretation anyway. Issues relating to this concern will be discussed in Chapter VI.

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The elitism that is present in the attitude of the sovereign individual also presents no difficulties for this reading. As was mentioned on pages 22–23, the unequal treatment this figure displayed towards others (depending upon whether or not they too were sovereign individuals) made it highly doubtful whether he could be a representative of the “modernist ideal of subjective autonomy”. If we see the sovereign individual as a figure from the past, however, there is no problem here at all. Equality is an ideal that we are still striving to achieve today, and that has only come to prominence in the latter stages of history. Hence, given the sovereign individual’s existence at the end of prehistory, there is no need to expect his actions to cohere with this extremely recent model of how human relations should be conducted.

This “fall and redemption” interpretation is also in a perhaps unique position to be able to explain the disagreement the two other views of the passage have over whether the sovereign individual coheres with or contradicts the views that Nietzsche puts forward in the rest of his writings. According to the standard view, to recap, the sovereign individual exemplifies a type of attained freedom and responsibility that Nietzsche often discusses in other parts of his work. The counter-ideal view, by contrast, claims that Nietzsche rejects notions such as free will and autonomy outright and hence cannot be seriously attributing such qualities to the sovereign individual. If we see the sovereign individual in the context of the “fall and redemption” reading, however, we can go some way towards explaining both of these viewpoints. Given that the purpose of this passage is to dramatize a type of freedom and responsibility that existed in the past, it is inevitable that it will tie in (to some extent) with Nietzsche’s vision of how these things might be achieved in the future. Yet, given that Nietzsche thinks that these qualities can no longer be found in his contemporaries, we can also understand part of his motivations for his hyperbolic claims that these notions are totally illusory: specifically, as an attempt to challenge modern man’s assumption that he possesses freedom and responsibility merely in virtue of being human.

So far in this section, I have examined how seeing the sovereign individual as a figure from the past can incorporate the evidence used in assessing the merits of the previous two interpretations I have discussed. Yet there is one considera-

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tion that cannot be accounted for directly. This is an argument used in favour of the counter-ideal view, which runs something along these lines: in the opening section of the Second Essay Nietzsche talks about the positive value of active forgetfulness. In the following section, when discussing the sovereign individual, he attributes to him a highly developed memory. Therefore, this argument concludes, Nietzsche cannot seriously be endorsing the sovereign individual, as this would involve him in a contradiction—that of positively valuing both memory and forgetfulness. The reason why this argument cannot be accounted for directly, however, is that it involves an essentially mistaken conception of Nietzsche's purpose in discussing active forgetfulness. In order for this argument to work, Nietzsche would have to be attributing some sort of absolute value to forgetfulness, such that anything which worked against it would necessarily have to be disvalued. Attributing this sort of absolute value to anything, however, would really seem to be an extremely un-Nietzschean move. It seems far more likely, by contrast, that what Nietzsche displays over the course of GM II: 1–2 is a somewhat more ambivalent attitude towards both memory and active forgetfulness. He values active forgetfulness for the role it can play in the healthy functioning of animal life, but he *also* values memory insofar as it has enabled new and valuable capacities (such as the ability to keep promises and extend one's will through time) to develop in man. In this sense, his attitude is very similar to that which he displays in the First Essay towards the increased intelligence brought about in human beings through the slave revolt in morality. In one sense, he clearly sees this increased intelligence as a negative phenomenon, as it takes mankind further away from the healthy, instinctual mode of life it once had. Yet, at the same time, he also recognizes that the possession of this increased intelligence is what has made man “an *interesting animal*” (GM I: 6) and has “brought a wealth of novel, disconcerting beauty and affirmation to light” (GM II: 18). Hence, to conclude that Nietzsche cannot value memory because he also values forgetfulness, would be a similar style of error to claiming that he cannot value the increased intelligence of mankind because he also admires the instinctual way mankind functioned prior to gaining this intelligence. Yet, this is clearly not the case. Therefore, despite what this argument implies, Nietzsche's purpose here is not to set up these two faculties as opponents, and then

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declare his allegiance to forgetfulness.

I have now touched upon all the considerations which have been advanced in favour of the previous two interpretations, and explained their relationship to the “fall and redemption” reading. Before moving on to my conclusion, however, I will advance some further thoughts that might be thought to speak in favour of this view.

Firstly, this interpretation fits neatly with a plausible account of exactly why Nietzsche chooses to dub this figure the *sovereign* individual. Throughout his writings, Nietzsche frequently echoes the Platonic view that the structure of the self can be understood by comparison with the structure of a society.³² In the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* quoted earlier, for example, he lists the hypothesis that the “soul” is a “society constructed out of drives and affects” as one that should possess “civil rights in the realm of science” from now on. Later in the same book, he also claims that “our body is. . . only a society constructed out of many souls” (BGE 19), and in the *Genealogy* he tells us that “our organism runs along oligarchic lines” (GM II: 1). When he describes the figure under discussion as the *sovereign* individual, therefore, it is hard not to be reminded of Plato’s comparisons of different types of individuals with different types of societies in the *Republic*. Moreover, this parallel is also backed up if we consider the salient features of a sovereign state alongside the characterization of the sovereign individual given by this “fall and redemption” reading. A sovereign state is characterized by all of the political power being concentrated into a single ruler, with all of the other aspects of the state being under their control. This is exactly the type of dominance that, according to this interpretation, Nietzsche attributes to the conscience in his depiction of the sovereign individual. Hence, the reason why the sovereign individual is the *sovereign* individual is because his soul is structured in the manner of a sovereign state—with a single ruling element determining the actions of the whole.

In addition to this, the “fall and redemption” reading also makes sense of the many similarities that can be found between the sovereign individual and the nobles of the First Essay. If we accept the timeline that is being proposed by this interpretation, the place in history this figure occupies would fall some-

³²This point has also been noted by Nehamas (1985, p.182–3).

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where between pre-history and the dominance of the ideal of self-hatred—in other words, he would be around during exactly the period of time when, according to Nietzsche, the nobles would have still existed and dominated large portions of Europe. Given this, it seems likely that if any sovereign individuals did actually exist, then they would have been found amongst the ranks of the nobles. If this is so, however, it would explain many of the remarks Nietzsche makes about his mindset and behaviour. Firstly, for example, there is the attitude he adopts towards those he takes to be below himself: one of disdain, mistrust, and superiority. This is precisely the attitude we are told that the noble displays towards the slave, and that Nietzsche characterizes as the “*pathos of distance*” (GM I: 2). Secondly, it would also explain the extreme similarities between their mode of valuation. In the middle of his description of the sovereign individual, Nietzsche tells us that:

The “free” man, the possessor of an enduring and unbreakable will, thus has his own *standard of value*: in the possession of such a will: viewing others from his own standpoint, he respects or despises; and just as he will necessarily respect his peers, the strong and the reliable (those with the prerogative to promise)... so he will necessarily be ready to kick the febrile whippets who promise without that prerogative, and will save the rod for the liar who breaks his word in the very moment it passes his lips.

(GM II: 2)

In other words, the sovereign individual uses the positive value he feels himself to have as a way of evaluating others. Those who are like him he takes to be good, those who are unlike him he takes to be bad. This, however, is a carbon copy of the “spontaneous” and “active” (GM I: 10) method of valuation that is attributed to the nobles in the First Essay, in contradistinction to the reactive method associated with slave morality. Finally, there is also the striking similarity of vocabulary that Nietzsche employs when describing both figures. This is particularly well instanced by his statement that the sovereign individual arouses “trust, fear, and respect”, in which it is difficult not to be reminded of his memorable claim that:

We may be quite justified in retaining our fear at the blond beast at the centre of every noble race and remain on our guard: but who would not, a hundred times

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over, prefer to fear if he can admire at the same time, rather than *not* fear, but thereby permanently retain the disgusting spectacle of the failed, the stunted, the wasted away and the poisoned?

(GM I: 11)

Final Thoughts on the Sovereign Individual

In the previous three sections of this chapter I have compared three different possible understandings of the role of the sovereign individual within Nietzsche's thought, and argued for the one I take to be most persuasive—namely, that which takes his significance to be intricately linked to the “fall and redemption” structure of the Second Essay. To conclude, I will look at how, if we accept this interpretation, this figure relates to Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy. To do this, I will compare the significance this reading assigns to the sovereign individual with that attributed to him by the other two interpretations I have discussed in this chapter. In both cases, I will examine the important areas of agreement and disagreement, and put forward my thoughts on what these differences entail for our understanding of this figure.

The most natural place to begin is with a comparison with the standard view. According to proponents of this view, the sovereign individual holds a very important place in regard to Nietzsche's views on autonomy. Not only is he a Nietzschean ideal, but he is so precisely because he represents a particular type of attained freedom that Nietzsche sees it as valuable for us emulate. Hence, when considering Nietzsche's autonomy ideal, GM II: 2 is potentially the most important passage available, and any higher individuals of the future (or indeed the present) who achieve the type of post-moral autonomy that Nietzsche is aiming to bring about will *actually be* sovereign individuals in the most literal sense.

In terms of the contrast between this understanding of the sovereign individual's significance and that attributed to him by the “fall and redemption” reading, one aspect is relatively simple to explain, whilst the other takes a little more work. The side that is fairly easy to explain is the similarities, so I will

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begin here. In a certain sense, the similarities are obvious: both attribute a positive attitude towards the sovereign individual to Nietzsche, and both see him as figure for emulation. Hence, loosely speaking, both of these views agree that he is some kind of ideal. After all, the purpose of Nietzsche giving the Second Essay this “fall and redemption” pattern is to try and play some part in the redemption, by raising an awareness of the exact nature of the problem at hand. In other words, Nietzsche does not describe this figure from the past merely in order to lament his disappearance, but rather as a reminder that freedom was possible in the past, and could be possible again. Therefore, just as with the standard view, this reading sees the sovereign individual as telling us something important about the nature of freedom, and who therefore must, to a certain extent at least, be emulated.

These similarities, however, belie an important underlying difference. As was mentioned above, there is a certain sense in which it is fair to say that both of these viewpoints see the sovereign individual as some sort of ideal. Yet, the sort of ideal that he is taken to be actually varies quite considerably between the two cases. As far as the standard view goes, the sovereign individual represents something along the lines of the finished article: he is literally Nietzsche’s ideal type of human being, and it is human beings of this type that Nietzsche is aiming to help try and bring about in the future through his writings. According to the “fall and redemption” reading, by contrast, the sovereign individual is an ideal in a slightly weaker sense. Rather than being a complete and accurate representation of Nietzsche’s imagined higher individuals of the future, he functions more along the lines of a foretaste or model for such individuals, without actually being one himself. Initially, the difference between these two positions may not seem all that clear, but it can be illuminated by a comparison with the nobles of the First Essay, who play a similar role in Nietzsche’s project in the *Genealogy*.

The First Essay then, very briefly, relates the story of a struggle between two different ethical systems—noble morality (or ‘good and bad’) and slave morality (or ‘good and evil’). These two systems originate in distinct social groups who are, unsurprisingly, referred to as the nobles and the slaves.³³ Now, two

³³This is not quite accurate, as slave morality actually originates with the priests, who are a

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of the main points that Nietzsche wants to get across in this essay are as follows: firstly, that noble morality represents a superior (and healthier) ethical system than slave morality (cf. GM I: 10–1 in particular), and secondly that slave morality has largely won out over the previously dominant noble morality, and now monopolizes the moral thinking of present day Europe (cf. GM I: 7–9). In addition to trying to persuade us of these two points, Nietzsche also uses this essay to voice his desire that a new form of noble morality should be instated, and to convince his readers (or some of them at least) that they should desire the same (GM I: 16–7). When looked at in this way, a familiar looking fall and redemption pattern becomes evident here as well: mankind once lived under a healthy and noble ethical system, lost this through the prevalence of a slavish system of valuation, and now must strive to once again become noble. Now, if we compare the pattern of the first two essays, it is obvious who corresponds to the figure of the sovereign individual within the context of the First Essay—namely, the original noble. Both the sovereign individual and the noble represent mankind in an earlier, healthier stage, and act as a figure who Nietzsche attaches positive value to, especially by comparison with modern man. Yet, as has been argued many times before, it is obvious that Nietzsche is not, and indeed cannot be, arguing for the re-emergence of the original noble in any simple sense. This is because, leaving aside the question of whether Nietzsche would see his re-emergence as desirable, the conditions that would make his re-emergence possible are simply not present. As the arguments for this claim have been made before, I will not go in to them too deeply here.³⁴ But, put briefly, the sort of existence led by the noble was only possible due to the relatively low level of internalization present in mankind at this early stage. Modern man, however, is internalized to a very high degree, and there is simply no way that this can be undone. Hence, granting that Nietzsche wants to bring about a new nobility, it must also be recognized that this new nobility will have to be different in many ways from that which existed previously, and that he cannot merely call for exactly the same set of noble values that previously existed to be

type of noble (cf. GM I: 6–7). However, as this type of morality is sustained and empowered through its being adopted by the slave class, this formulation will suffice here.

³⁴For a fuller treatment of this issue, see Ridley (1998, p.128–34).

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brought to the fore again. Hence, whilst it is true that Nietzsche both admires and idealizes the original nobles, it is also the case that the creation of a new noble morality cannot simply involve a direct replication of the noble values that existed previously. Rather, a new noble morality must share certain core features with its predecessor,³⁵ but must also take into account the many changes that human beings and human society have undergone since the emergence of slave morality.

This relationship that obtains between the original nobles and any future noble morality that may arise is, according to the “fall and redemption” reading, parallel with that which holds between the sovereign individual and any individuals possessing autonomy that may arise in the future. Moreover, the reasons why this relationship is the same are also parallel: the conditions which made sovereign individuals possible are simply no longer present. As was discussed on pages 29–30, the defining feature of the sovereign individual is his possession of conscience as a dominant instinct. Yet, as was also discussed earlier, the reason why sovereign individuals no longer exist is because of the transformation of conscience into bad conscience. Hence, if Nietzsche wanted to recreate sovereign individuals in any literal sense, the only way to do so would be by undoing this transformation—in other words, by removing bad conscience and reinstating conscience as the instinctual director of man’s actions. As should be obvious, however, this would be an impossible task. Firstly, if the sovereign did exist during a time when mankind still lived according to the demands of a relatively coherent instinct structure, this would involve a task similar to that of recreating the original nobles: the increased level of consciousness brought about in modern man by internalization would have to be reversed. In addition to this, however, there is simply no obvious way to remove a phenomenon like bad conscience which has, according to Nietzsche, become so deeply embedded in the psyche of modern man. This is why, in one of his own attempts to

³⁵Most obviously, it must be ‘active’ instead of ‘reactive’, in the sense of starting out from a feeling of one’s own satisfaction with oneself, rather than from a desire to chastise and admonish those features of others that one sees as undesirable or threatening (cf. GM I: 10–1). It also seems likely that it will have to recognize the intricate link between a person’s character and the sort of actions that the person in question is capable of performing—a link denied in slave morality’s contention that we have an absolutely free will (cf. GM I: 13). These are only two examples, and more structural similarities could possibly be drawn out from Nietzsche’s works.

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suggest how bad conscience might be overcome, Nietzsche recognizes that bad conscience itself might need to have a role to play. Here is Nietzsche's most explicit statement regarding this issue:

We moderns have inherited millennia of conscience-vivisection and animal-torture inflicted on ourselves: we have had most practice in it, are perhaps artists in the field, in any case it is our *refinement* and the indulgence of our taste. For too long, man has viewed his natural inclinations with an "evil eye", so that they finally became intertwined with "bad conscience" in him. A reverse experiment should be possible *in principle*—but who has sufficient strength?—by this, I mean an intertwining of bad conscience with *perverse* inclinations, all those other-worldly aspirations, alien to the senses, the instincts, to nature, to animals, in short all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life and have defamed the world.

(GM II: 24)

As this passage demonstrates, Nietzsche is not so naïve as to believe that bad conscience can be removed or reversed in any simple sense. Instead, he recognizes that bad conscience is a phenomenon we must now live with, and any attempt to move beyond it may well have to employ the very resources of bad conscience itself in doing so.³⁶ Due to this fact, the sovereign individual, as a figure who arose under conditions we can no longer replicate exactly, can only serve us so far as an ideal. Whilst we can recognize that many of his qualities, such as the unity his character possesses over time and the strength of his will, are essential for any type of autonomy we can hope to possess, it would be pointless and impossible to try and recreate him exactly. Therefore, whilst he should be recognized as an ideal of sorts, he is certainly not Nietzsche's ideal type in the stronger sense suggested by the standard view.

These, then, comprise the important similarities and differences between the significance attributed to the sovereign individual by the "fall and redemption" reading and by the standard view: they agree that the sovereign individual is some sort of ideal for Nietzsche, but disagree over how strongly we should understand this claim. I will now look at the contrast between the "fall and redemption" reading and the view that the sovereign individual is a counter-ideal.

³⁶This is a point which has also been made by Ridley (1998). See Chapter 6 in particular.

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To begin with, it is worth reiterating the significance that the counter-ideal view attributes to GM II: 2 within the larger context of Nietzsche's views on freedom as an ideal. As was previously discussed, this interpretation sees the sovereign individual as being part of an elaborate trick Nietzsche is playing on his readers. Rather than being a faithful portrayal of Nietzsche's own views, he is actually a representative of the "modernist ideal of subjective autonomy" which Nietzsche is out to criticize. As such, the significance of the sovereign individual is to be understood negatively rather than positively. In other words, the sovereign individual is intended to represent an understanding of human freedom that Nietzsche believes to be essentially incoherent and harmful to its proponents. Therefore, GM II: 2 works as something along the lines of a summary of the conception of autonomy that Nietzsche is out to destroy, and offers very little constructive evidence about the type of post-moral freedom, if any, that Nietzsche envisions for the future.

Just as was the case with the comparison with the standard view, one aspect of the contrast between these two views is easier to explain than the other. In this case, it is the differences between the two views that are simpler to express, so I will begin with these. Perhaps most basically, there is a vast difference in the attitude towards the sovereign individual that they each attribute to Nietzsche. Whilst the "fall and redemption" reading does not go as far as the standard view in the positive valuation it takes Nietzsche to have of the sovereign individual, it still believes that he essentially approves of this figure. According to the counter-ideal reading, on the other hand, Nietzsche totally rejects the very possibility of the sort of autonomy embodied in the sovereign individual, and is basically hostile to people who aspire to be like this type. Moreover, the "fall and redemption" view also thinks that some lessons can be taken from the sovereign individual about what autonomy might look like in the post-moral age, even if it must be remembered that these lessons cannot necessarily be applied in any straightforward or direct fashion. If we accept the counter-ideal view, by contrast, the only lessons we can draw from the sovereign individual are in how *not* to conceive of freedom.

In spite of these major disagreements, however, there is one important sense in which these two views coincide. This is because they both agree that the

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sovereign individual is not Nietzsche's ideal type, and hence both maintain that what Nietzsche is aiming to do is to bring about individuals who are, as we might put it, supra-sovereign. In other words, both of these two readings share the belief that the sovereign individual should not be understood as a representative of the type of person that Nietzsche wants to bring about in the future, and that the higher individuals in which he does place his hopes will have to, in some sense, move beyond the ideal that is embodied by this figure.

Obviously, they both hold this belief for drastically different reasons. In the case of the counter-ideal view, higher individuals will have to move beyond the figure of the sovereign individual because he represents the "modernist ideal of subjective autonomy"—a mistaken belief that a person can become the absolute and sole author of their actions in some metaphysical sense. Yet, despite not sharing this conception of what the sovereign individual is supposed to exemplify, it is no less true for the "fall and redemption" reading that anyone wishing to achieve any type of post-moral autonomy will have to go further than simply imitating the sovereign individual. This is largely due to the reasons touched upon earlier in this section: the conditions which made sovereign individuals possible no longer exist. Therefore, any individuals of the future who do attain anything like the same degree of freedom as was possessed by the sovereign individual will have to use the materials which the current condition of mankind presents to them in doing so. To conclude this chapter, I will now put forward a few thoughts on the differences between the situation of mankind now and during the time when sovereign individuals were possible, and discuss how these differences will affect the nature of any higher individuals fitting Nietzsche's conception that may come about.

The first major difference, and probably the most obvious, is the degree to which mankind's life takes place at the level of reflective consciousness rather than, in some sense, instinctively. As has been mentioned a couple of times now, the sovereign individual existed at a stage of human development when man was not a self-conscious being to the same degree as he is now. Rather, his actions were determined by his conscience, which functioned as a "dominant instinct". Modern man, by contrast, has around two thousand more years of internalization behind him, and hence leads his life far more at the level of de-

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liberative consciousness. Given this fact, any unity which human beings impose on their character in the future, and hence any freedom that they achieve, may well need to rely upon the faculty of conscious reflection to a greater extent in doing so. This is demonstrated in Nietzsche's famous account of giving style to one's character (GS 290), along with many other passages in his work which give directions on how to consciously apply artistic (or indeed horticultural) methods in the creation of a character.³⁷ Higher individuals of the future, therefore, will not necessarily be able to rely on instinctive forces to unify their character in the same way that sovereign individuals could.

This is not to say that reflective consciousness is the only force that could possibly be used to unify the characters of higher individuals of the future. As Nietzsche states when discussing the formation of his own character in *Ecce Homo*, "[b]ecoming what you are presupposes that you do not have the slightest idea *what* you are" (EH: "Why I am so Clever", 9). The meaning of this enigmatic statement is explained more fully in the course of the passage, where Nietzsche explains that not deliberately attempting to create a character for yourself can actually facilitate the process in question:

The whole surface of consciousness—consciousness is a surface—has to be kept free from all of the great imperatives. Be careful even of great words, great attitudes. They pose the threat that instinct will "understand itself" too early.—In the mean time, the organizing, governing "idea" keeps growing deep inside,—it starts commanding, it slowly leads *back* from out of the side roads and wrong turns, it gets the *individual* qualities and virtues ready, since at some point these will prove indispensable as means to the whole,—one by one, it develops all the *servile* faculties before giving any clue as to the domineering task, the "goal", the "purpose", the "meaning".

(EH: "Why I am so Clever", 9)

The thought here is clearly that the "governing 'idea'" that makes a person become what they are can be at work within an individual without that person actually having any reflective awareness of the content of the idea. Hence, the creation of that person's character does proceed in a fashion that we might

³⁷GS 299 and D 560 provide good examples of both types of metaphor

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call instinctive, below the “surface” that constitutes their conscious awareness. At first glance, this might seem to sit at odds with Nietzsche many recommendations that we should consciously attempt to give a unity to our character. Nietzsche’s hyperbole aside, however, there is no reason to think that both of these methods of attaining unity could not sit side by side within one historical age (although perhaps not in one person). Therefore, the overall lesson to be gleaned here is that for higher individuals of the future, unlike the sovereign individuals of the past, both deliberately giving style to one’s character using the tools of self-consciousness, as well as allowing one’s character to form without any intentional input, will provide possible routes to the sort of unified self that will enable freedom to flourish again.³⁸

There is also another significant difference between the current condition of mankind and that which obtained during the era when sovereign individuals were still possible, according to the account Nietzsche gives—namely, the diversity and complexity of the drives which make up human beings. Here, we meet with some of the less pleasant aspects of Nietzsche’s thought, because the reason for this largely seems to reside in the extensive mixing of races that has contributed to the nature of modern man. Here is a statement of this idea from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

In an age of disintegration where the races are mixed together, a person will have the legacy of multiple lineages in his body, which means conflicting (and often not merely conflicting) drives and value standards that fight with each other and rarely leave each other alone. A man like this, of late cultures and refracted lights, will typically be a weaker person: his most basic desire is for an end to the war that he *is*.

(BGE 200)

The idea that Nietzsche expresses here is basically that individuals from the modern era, due to their more mixed biological heritage, will contain a far greater number of “drives and value standards” than people would have done in the past. Moreover, this collection of drives etc. will be more varied and conflicting than those of human beings who only have one cultural descent.

³⁸I will return to the theme of Nietzsche’s views on consciousness and discuss them more fully in Chapter IV.

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I do not wish to discuss the merits of this particular view here. Given, however, that Nietzsche does believe this to be the case, it does have some important implications for the nature of any higher individuals who may achieve a type of post-moral autonomy in the future. This is because, due to his existence in the distant past, the sovereign individual would have been constituted by a far smaller collection of drives than people are today. In addition to this, the drives that he did possess would, in virtue of his relatively steady heritage, have been far more naturally unified than those we would expect to find in modern man. Therefore, an important sense in which any higher individuals of the future will differ from the sovereign individuals of the past will be the fact that they will have a far more diverse and conflicting set of drives with which to work, which will be more difficult to unify into a coherent whole.³⁹

As Nietzsche himself recognizes, the greater diversity and complexity to be found in modern man can be either a blessing or a curse. For those who Nietzsche would describe as “weaker”, it can make the task of giving any sort of unity to their character impossible. As Nietzsche points out later on in the passage quoted above, however, it can also be of great benefit to other types of person:

if conflict and war affect such a nature as one *more* stimulus and goad to life—, and if genuine proficiency and finesse in waging war with himself (which is to say: the ability to control and outwit himself) are inherited and cultivated along with his most powerful and irreconcilable drives, then what emerge are those amazing, incomprehensible, and unthinkable ones, those human riddles destined for victory and for seduction

(BGE 200)

Hence, it is fair to say that the complex nature of modern man is something of a double-edged sword. For those without the abilities necessary to master their conflicting drives, it means that their lives will be characterized by a sort of internal chaos and disunity, and their “most basic desire” will be for an end to the war that constitutes their self. For those who do possess the requisite abilities, on the other hand, the incredible variety of contrasting drives that

³⁹This thought owes much to Richardson (1996). See section 2.5 in particular.

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make them up will provide the sort of strong resistances that Nietzsche sees it as necessary for great individuals to overcome on their path to becoming who they are. Moreover, it will open up the possibility of individuals who possess a far richer unity, based on a more complex and diverse set of drives and affects.⁴⁰ Hence, whilst it is true that Nietzsche considers the sovereign individual a striking figure, and one worthy of our admiration and respect, it should also be remembered that the many changes mankind has undergone since the time of his existence have created new possibilities for mankind as a whole, and particularly for those “amazing, incomprehensible, and unthinkable ones” that Nietzsche conceives of as the higher humanity of the future.

⁴⁰Issues relating to Nietzsche's notion of unity, and his conception of unity-in-diversity, will be treated more fully in Chapter V.

CHAPTER III

ETHICS AND AUTONOMY

This chapter aims to establish two separate but related points about the relationship between autonomy and ethics in Nietzsche's thought. The first is that Nietzsche held a view which is found, in more or less similar forms, in the works of a variety of thinkers throughout the history of philosophy, namely that autonomy¹ requires ethical living.² The second, and more substantial, of the two points, by contrast, is one which is far more particular to Nietzsche: that in order to achieve the highest degrees of autonomy possible for human beings, it is essential that the ethic a person lives by is somehow *personalized* or *customized* in such a way as to enhance the flourishing of the individual in question.

As a first step on the way to establishing these two points, I will discuss the stipulative use of the term 'ethics' that I will be employing throughout this chapter, and its relation to the ethics/morality distinction first made by Bernard Williams in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* and later applied more specifically to Nietzsche's thought by Maudemarie Clark. Here, I will emphasize that I will be using the term to signify something broader than it is usually used to signify, to mean something roughly along the lines of 'any life-directing procedure that excludes simply following one's immediate desires and inclinations'. I will also

¹Given that Nietzsche believes that autonomy is a matter of degree, and not something one either possesses or does not possess, this could be phrased more precisely as 'any significant level of autonomy'.

²Most notably by two thinkers who Nietzsche is normally keen to stress his opposition to: Plato and Kant.

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advance some considerations to suggest that this use of the term is appropriate in the context of Nietzsche's thought.

After clarifying this crucial concept, I will then move on to the investigation proper. Here, I will begin by establishing the first of the two claims above, that Nietzsche takes ethical living to be necessary for any worthwhile degree of autonomy. My argument here will proceed negatively, i.e. by showing that Nietzsche believes that the lowest degrees of autonomy are possessed by those who live by no ethic at all, or, which comes to the same thing by my definition, by those who let their lives be determined solely by their immediate desires.

I will then move on to the second of the two claims mentioned above: that the ethic a person lives by needs to be personalized in such a way as to promote their own individual flourishing in order to achieve the highest degrees of autonomy possible for human beings. The first step towards establishing this claim will be fairly simple: given that autonomy means self-determination, living by an ethics which is, in some sense, *one's own* will obviously yield a higher degree of autonomy than allowing one's actions to be determined by an ethic that is merely accepted from some external source. This, however, only takes us so far, and still does not explain the necessity that the ethic a person lives by be *both* their own *and* tailored to promote their own flourishing.

In order to explain why the second half of this conjunction is required, I will look a bit more closely at a particularly relevant subset of Nietzsche's writings: those that concern the creation of value. In this section of the chapter, I will have two main aims. The first will be exegetical, i.e. getting clear about exactly what Nietzsche understands the creation of value to involve. Here, strange as it may initially sound, I will use a comparison with the Kantian moral agent to shed light on the Nietzschean creator of values. One main point I will stress is that, in spite of Nietzsche's choice of language, we should not understand the sort of 'creation' involved in the creation of value by analogy with our ordinary understanding of artistic creation—i.e. as being some of free act of expression based on an individual's desires and inclinations. Instead, it should be understood as heavily constrained by facts about which values most effectively promote the flourishing of the agent in question.

Finally, I will conclude by considering why, on Nietzsche's account, the

highest degrees of autonomy available come about through living according to an ethic which is personalized, in the sense of being specifically tailored to enhance the flourishing of the individual in question. The broad outline of my argument here will be that Nietzsche takes autonomy and power to be intimately related, such that an increase in the degree of an agent's autonomy is essentially tantamount to a heightening of their power as an agent. Therefore, given that a personalized ethic is one which is particularly suited to enhancing the flourishing of the agent who possesses it—which is, on Nietzsche's account, equivalent to it increasing their power—it follows that such a personalized ethic will also be a particularly effective way of increasing that agent's autonomy.

Williams and Ethics

Throughout this chapter I will be using the word 'ethic' (and its cognates) in a very specific fashion, which owes much to the work of Bernard Williams. Hence, before beginning the investigation proper, I will give a brief account of the ethics/morality distinction as employed by Williams, and discuss how my use of the term relates to Williams'. I will also give some reasons for thinking that the term, as I intend to use it, is appropriate when applied to Nietzsche's thought.

Williams first makes a distinction between ethics and morality in his book *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. As Williams himself recognizes, these two terms are ordinarily used synonymously, hence this distinction is not intended to track anything in our ordinary usage of these words. Rather, it is made as part of Williams' critique of the "morality system" (2006, p.182) and amounts, roughly, to this: an ethic is "any scheme for regulating the relations between people that works through informal sanctions and internalized dispositions" (1995a, p.241),³ whereas "morality should be understood as a particular devel-

³Clark also cites this definition, which comes from "Moral luck: a postscript". The definition given by May, which is clearly a response to that of Williams, is also worth mentioning: "I take 'ethics' to be concerned with two general questions, to which the traditional 'morality' examined by Nietzsche supplies a very particular set of answers: namely, what is the 'good' life for agents? And what are the best means—virtues, values, and practices—for attaining it? How I regulate my behaviour towards others is, on this definition, only one aspect of the good and

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opment of the ethical, one that has special significance in modern Western culture" (2006, p.6). Ethics, therefore, is the more general of the two terms. There are many different possible ethical outlooks, and morality is but one of these. Or, to put this point another way, morality is one of the determinate forms that the determinable notion of the ethical can take. In terms of characterizing exactly what morality is, there is no uncontroversial definition available. Williams does suggest a few characteristic features that define it as the particular ethical outlook it is though: "it peculiarly emphasizes certain ethical notions rather than others, developing in particular a special notion of obligation, and it has some peculiar presuppositions" (2006, p.6). Amongst the notions emphasized, according to Williams, are guilt and blame, and the "peculiar suppositions" being referenced here include things like "a voluntariness that will be total and will cut through character and psychological or social determination" (2006, p.194) and "a resistance to luck" (1995a, p.241).

The difficulties that lie in defining morality need not detain me here, as it is the other half of this distinction that I intend to make use of in this piece. However, whilst my use of the term 'ethic' is certainly inspired by Williams' distinction, I will not be using the term in exactly the same way as he does. This is partly a result of approaching the issue from different angles. Williams, in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* at least, is looking to give an outline of what counts as an *ethical consideration* when making decisions, and hence does this by giving prominent examples of what both ethical and non-ethical considerations look like. In this chapter, by contrast, I will be more interested in the related notion of an ethic: something along the lines of a more or less systematic collection of goals to be achieved, rules to be followed, values to promote, virtues to cultivate, etc. which play a significant role in determining how a person feels they should act on a given occasion.

This is a fairly minor difference all told, and there is another that is more major. To see what this is, it will be useful to look at the context in which Williams introduces the ethics/morality distinction. The chapter in which Williams first discusses it is called "Socrates' Question". The question being looked at here is the central ethical question 'how should one live?', asked by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*.¹

its attainment." (1999, p.3).

Republic. When the issue is framed in this way, it is tempting to see an ethic as anything which provides an answer, at the appropriate level, to this question, and this is not far from the definition that I want to give. Williams resists this conclusion though, as it would mean even a “bald egoism” (2006, p.12) would fall within its boundaries and hence be classified as an ethical way of life. In applying this term to Nietzsche’s thought, however, I do not think we should follow Williams here. Egoism, conceived here as a possible way of life rather than any sort of descriptive claim about human beings, does provide an answer to the question ‘how should one live?’ That answer is, at its highest level of generality, do whatever is best for oneself regardless of the consequences this has for others.⁴ Hence, it *is* an ethic in the highly extended stipulative sense of the word that I am using here. Whether or not it is a *good* ethic is a separate question, but it remains a possible ethical outlook nonetheless.

The term ‘ethic’ as I will use it will therefore have a broader application than it would if I were faithfully trying to extract the term from Williams, in the simple sense that far more possible styles of life will be classed as being lived according to an ethic. There is a further issue to be raised though, as this term is clearly too broad as it stands. This is shown by considering the question: what type of life would *not* be classified as lived according to an ethic, on this definition? No obvious answer springs to mind, as it is possible to portray any life as being governed by some such goals, principles, etc. even if the person in question does not formulate these explicitly or give particularly in-depth consideration to such matters. The point cannot be that living according to an ethic has to involve consciously codifying the rules by which one lives one’s life. There might be some people who would endorse such a view, but I think it is almost certain that Nietzsche wouldn’t be amongst them. Rather, there must be something else that distinguishes what I am calling ethical living from non-ethical living.

The missing component in the Nietzschean idea I am trying to capture, I suggest, is supplied by the two related ideas of discipline and form-giving. An ethic, therefore, should not be understood as simply any set of goals, values,

⁴Obviously this doesn’t exclude the possibility that what is best for one’s self often involves showing consideration for others.

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etc. which provides an individual with a way of answering Socrates' question. Rather, it should be understood as a set of goals, values, etc. which both plays a significant role in determining the person's actions, *and* involves self-discipline and form-giving, or to point this final clause another way, excludes simply following one's immediate desires and inclinations in a straightforward fashion.⁵

This definition is still very broad, but that actually suits my purposes here. For what I want is to use this term to capture the wide variety of different phenomena that Nietzsche recommends to his would-be followers at different points: giving oneself laws, creating one's own set of values, living one's life according to an artistic plan, cultivating personal virtues, striving towards an idealized version of one's self, and so on.⁶ These all represent different types of ethical consideration which stand in no obvious or uncontroversial relation to one another. A set of laws is not the same thing as a set of values, although the values that a person holds and the laws that they endorse as applying to themselves will obviously have to harmonize if the person in question is to be able to live a life which is an adequate expression of both. Similarly, striving towards an idealized picture of one's self will inevitably involve cultivating some virtues, but it is certainly not true that this is all it will involve, and the relevant set of virtues will not simply emerge straightforwardly from considering the type of person one is trying to become. The usefulness of the term ethic, as I will employ it, lies in the fact that it can encompass all of the different types of ethical consideration listed above (and more), without giving special prominence to any of them in particular, and without making any special assumptions about the relationships between them.

It is this feature of the notion of an ethic that makes it particularly appropriate when applied to Nietzsche's thought. This is partly because, as was mentioned above, Nietzsche is willing to recommend a highly varied set of ethical considerations as being beneficial to his target audience, without seeming to sug-

⁵As an early indication of the plausibility of attributing this view to Nietzsche, consider the following statement from *Twilight of the Idols*: "What I do *not* mean by freedom... '—In times like these, giving in to your instincts is just one more disaster. The instincts contradict, disturb, destroy each other... Today the individual would first need to be made possible by being *cut down and pruned*: possible here means *complete*" (II: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 41).

⁶See A 11, BGE 214 and 272, GS 290, 299 and 335 and UM III: 1 for a few examples.

gest that any of these is superior to the others. However, there is also more to it than this. This term, as I will use it at least, also accommodates the fact that Nietzsche himself doesn't clearly distinguish between different types of ethical consideration. In a passage that we will have reason to come back to later, for example, Nietzsche moves unreflectively from talk of living one's life according to "an artistic plan" to the idea of "being bound by but also perfected under [one's] own law" (GS 290). Similarly, in another passage I will draw on later, Nietzsche talks interchangeably of the necessity that a "virtue... be our *own* invention", the need for each one of us to devise "his *own* categorical imperatives", and the harm done to a people "when it confuses its *own* duty with the concept of duty in general" (A 11). My stipulative use of the term 'ethic' is therefore not arbitrary, but reflects features of Nietzsche's own philosophical practice: his refusal to give preference to one type of ethical consideration above the others (as a virtue theorist or Kantian advocate of duty might, for example), as well as the fact that he doesn't himself carefully distinguish between all the different types of consideration that we might label ethical.

Ethical Living and Autonomy

Now that the use I will make of the notion of an ethic has been made clear, it is time to establish the first of the two claims I intend to argue for in this chapter: that Nietzsche believes autonomy requires living according to an ethic. As was mentioned in the introduction, many thinkers throughout the history of philosophy have endorsed similar sounding claims. The particular variant of this claim that Nietzsche himself endorses is, however, very different from the more standard forms that it can take, so it will be useful to begin by registering these differences. Most thinkers who endorse a version of this claim mean something akin to the following: that living according to the dictates of one particular ethical outlook (usually those of traditional Western morality) is the one true way of living autonomously. This view is almost as un-Nietzschean as one can get, and it is clear that Nietzsche would not give his assent to anything of the sort. The claim I think he would endorse, on the other hand, is far more general. His claim, as I take it, would be more along these lines: that living according to *any*

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ethic gives a greater degree of autonomy than living according to no ethic at all.

In order to show Nietzsche's commitment to something along these lines, it will be helpful to exchange this formulation of the claim for one that is, given my specialized use of the notion of an ethic, equivalent: namely, that simply following one's immediate desires and inclinations yields only the lowest degrees of autonomy. Nietzsche, in a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, calls this style of living "*laisser-aller*", and is unequivocal in asserting his belief that it is not a style of life which results in the freedom of the person who adopts it:

Every morality, as opposed to *laisser-aller*, is a piece of tyranny against both "nature" and "reason". But this in itself is no objection; for that, we would have to issue yet another decree based on some other morality forbidding every sort of tyranny and unreason. What is essential about every morality is that it is a long compulsion.⁷ In order to understand Stoicism or Port-Royal or Puritanism, just remember the compulsion under which every language so far has developed strength and freedom: the compulsion of meter, the tyranny of rhyme and rhythm. Look how much trouble the poets and the orators of every country have to go through! (including some of today's prose writers, who have an inexorable conscience in their ear)—and all "for the sake of some stupidity", as utilitarian fools say (and think they are clever for saying it)—or "in obsequious submission to arbitrary laws", as anarchists say (and then imagine themselves "free", even free-spirited). But the strange fact is that everything there is, or was, of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance, or masterly assurance on earth, whether in thinking itself, or in ruling, or in speaking and persuading, in artistic just as in ethical practices, has only developed by virtue of the "tyranny of such arbitrary laws". And, in all seriousness, it is not at all improbable that *this* is what is "nature" and "natural"—and *not* that *laisser-aller*!

(BGE 188)

and, further on in the same passage:

I will say it again: what seems to be essential "in heaven and on earth" is that there be *obedience* in one direction for a long time. In the long term, this always

⁷This statement provides some support for my earlier claim that discipline is, for Nietzsche at least, a necessary component of anything that is to count as an ethic. The fact that Nietzsche is talking about what I am calling ethics here, rather than talking about morality in the more specific sense, is shown by his use of the phrase "every morality". Obviously there is only one morality in the restricted sense employed in Williams' distinction.

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brings and has brought about something that makes life on earth worth living—for instance: virtue, art, music, dance, reason, intellect—something that transfigures, something refined, fantastic, and divine. The long un-freedom of spirit, the mistrustful constraint in the communicability of thought, the discipline that thinkers imposed on themselves, thinking within certain guidelines imposed by the church or court or Aristotelian presuppositions, the long, spiritual will to interpret every event according to a Christian scheme and to rediscover and justify the Christian God in every chance event,—all this violence, arbitrariness, harshness, terror, and anti-reason has shown itself to be the means through which strength, reckless curiosity, and subtle agility have been bred into the European spirit.

(BGE 188)

There are many interesting points made in this passage, but there is one that is particularly relevant to my argument here: that it is a mistake to equate freedom with lack of constraint. Here as elsewhere, Nietzsche does not hold back in his criticism of those who make this mistake. In the famous passage on free will from *Beyond Good and Evil*, he says that “It is almost always a symptom of what is lacking in a thinker when he senses some compulsion, need, having-to-follow, pressure, un-freedom in every ‘causal connection’ and ‘psychological necessity’”. It is very telling to feel this way—the person tells on himself” (BGE 21). Something similar is being claimed by Nietzsche here. Seeing freedom as being tantamount to living under no constraints is simply a symptom of not being the sort of person capable of meeting the demands that such constraints set and flourishing under them. This is not, however, a harmless or minor error. Freedom has not merely been mischaracterized by those who endorse the viewpoint of *laissez-aller*. Rather, it has been characterized in a way that is exactly opposed to the truth of the matter: constraint has been painted as being incompatible with freedom, when in fact it is required for it.

This passage, and others like it, give strong evidence that Nietzsche opposes the idea that autonomy consists merely in the lack of constraint. Indeed, he even holds the directly opposing view: that a complete lack of constraints leads to the lowest degrees of autonomy possible, and that the higher levels can only be achieved with the help of the sort of constraint involved in “every morality”.

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Yet the question of why this is so still remains. To the best of my knowledge, Nietzsche never gives an explicit argument for this position.⁸ However, I think it is fairly easy to reconstruct one from some recognizably Nietzschean premises.

The first such premise, which has indeed become a commonplace in writing about Nietzsche, is that human beings are not guaranteed a unified self simply in virtue of being human.⁹ In their naturally occurring state, people are simply a collection of a large number of differing drives and affects. The exact drives and affects that make up the individual differ in their strength, and perhaps even in their nature and number, from person to person, as does the coherence and order amongst them. Plus, as far as Nietzsche is concerned at least, disorder and incoherence are by far the more common state of affairs. This picture means that, left to their own devices at least, human beings are less like single unified individuals and more like a collection of warring homunculi, with each drive in direct competition with all of the others to control the behaviour of the person in question.

The next premise is that human beings are capable of moving from this state of affairs to one in which they do possess a reasonable degree of unified selfhood, or, as this is often put, that genuine selfhood is possible for human beings, but it is an achievement rather than a given. This achievement involves, for Nietzsche, setting to work on the raw material of one's drives and affects, and forging them into some sort of unity.¹⁰ As there are many differing aspects to one's self,

⁸He does, however, offer some related considerations. Most commonly, he makes psychological observations intended to show that people who oppose this view do so out of weakness and/or out of a desire to shirk responsibility for their own actions (cf. GS 290, BGE 199 and TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 41). He also, in the passage quoted most recently (BGE 188), gives a phenomenological account of artistic creation which is intended to show that acts of free creation do not feel like acts performed under no constraint whatsoever, but rather that the artist "knows how strictly and subtly he obeys thousands of laws at this very moment, laws that defy conceptual formulation precisely because of their hardness and determinateness". Exactly what this is supposed to prove, and how successfully it does so, are not issues I will discuss here

⁹Nehamas, for example, expresses this common view perfectly: "The unity of the self, which therefore also constitutes its identity, is not something given but something achieved, not a beginning but a goal" (1985, p.182). For a couple of other examples, see Gemes (2009, p.38) and Richardson (1996, p.49).

¹⁰This issue will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter V.

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this unity obviously cannot be literal singularity. Rather, it is what might be characterized as a harmonious unity—one in which the aims of all (or most) of one’s different drives and affects are integrated, and work together towards shared ends rather than battling against each other for dominance. There is no single twelve-step program available for the achievement of such unity, but, generally speaking, it seems to involve fusing several drives into a single pattern of activity in which they can all participate, cultivating certain drives which fit well with others, and removing drives which do not. There are many different parts of Nietzsche’s works which suggest such a picture, but the most famous is surely the following passage from *The Gay Science*:

To “give style” to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed—both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisting shape has been saved and employed for distant views—it is supposed to beckon towards the remote and immense. In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small—whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it’s enough that it was one taste!

(GS 290)

Once this picture of human selfhood as an achievement is in place we can begin to understand why autonomy requires ethical living for Nietzsche: roughly speaking, because unified selfhood is a minimum condition of effective self-determination, and living according to an ethic is required for unifying the self. Those who live the life of *laisser-aller*, the opposite of ethical living by my definition, simply follow their immediate desires and inclinations, shunning any possible “arbitrary” constraints on their actions. Given the natural state of human beings that Nietzsche proposes, however, the result of such a *laisser-aller* lifestyle is not a single self. Rather, the person who simply follows their immediate desires and inclinations without imposing any form of them comes

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out looking rather more like several different selves inhabiting the same body— whichever drive is strongest at a given time is the sole determiner of action, and different and conflicting drives will determine the person's actions at different times. There is no single plan (or ethic) which all these actions can be explained by reference to, and the result will not be a single, coherent and unified individual, but rather something closer to a battleground upon which opposing tendencies battle with each other for dominance, with nothing determining the outcome of this battle except for the relative strengths of the particular drives involved.

It is this relationship between ethical living and selfhood that underpins the relationship between ethical living and autonomy. For, put very simply, there cannot be autonomy (self-determination) if there is no unified self to be autonomous. The actions of a person living the life of *laissez-aller* appear to be autonomous, as there is no external force determining them. This appearance masks the actual truth of the matter though. For whilst external constraints are lacking, so is the sort of 'internal' unity that is required for legitimately seeing these actions as issuing from a single character at all. Moreover, this internal unity is lacking precisely because of the absence of constraints upon the actions of the person in question, whether these constraints are taken unquestioningly from an outside source (such as God's will or from a supposedly universal morality) or created explicitly by and for the individual who will submit to them. Hence an ethic, conceived as something that places limits upon which actions are permissible and which dispositions are to be cultivated, is essential to the sort of autonomy Nietzsche envisages as possible for human beings.

Personalized Ethics

I will now move on to discussing the second of the two claims that I wish to defend in this chapter, that the highest degrees of autonomy possible for human beings involve living according to an ethic which is somehow personalized or customized.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there might seem to be an incredibly simple argument for this claim. As autonomy means self-

determination, it seems obviously true that living according to an ethic which is *one's own*, in the sense of being personally created, will lead to a higher degree of autonomy than simply living according to an ethic which has been received unquestioningly from an outside source. This argument, however, only establishes that the ethic a person lives by must be personal in a weak sense, i.e. in the sense of being created by the individual in question. Nietzsche's claim, as I take it, is stronger than this. To achieve the highest levels of autonomy possible, the ethic a person lives by must not simply be personal in this weaker sense. Instead, it needs to be personalized in the stronger sense of being specifically tailored to enhance the flourishing of the individual in question.¹¹

In order to establish this claim, I will take a particular relevant subset of Nietzsche's writings as a sort of case study, namely those that concern the creation of value. Here, my aim will be twofold. Firstly, in the remainder of this section, I will argue that the creation of value, in the form that Nietzsche recommends it at least, does not involve the free creation of any values whatsoever in a valueless void, but is rather much closer to the phenomenon I have just described, i.e. it consists in creating a set of values that are beneficial precisely and specifically for the person who creates them. I will then conclude by discussing why, for Nietzsche, a set of personalized values of this kind are necessary for the highest degree of autonomy possible for human beings.

The Creation of Value

To begin with, it is worth making some preliminary remarks. Sometimes, and particularly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the language Nietzsche employs can tempt us into thinking about the creation of value in a somewhat confusing fashion—as a (or perhaps even *the*) supremely creative deed, in which a new thing, a value, is brought into the world to compete with, and ideally replace, values that already exist. This intuitive picture of value creation relies upon a particular way of using the word value, according to which 'value' is an generic type of which there are many different specific instances: courage is a value, honesty is a value, and so on.

¹¹More will be said about this personal/personalized distinction on pages 98–100.

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If this were the sort of thing Nietzsche had in mind, the idea of the creation of value would have some very strange consequences. Presumably, on a fairly natural reading, it would involve the invention of entirely (or at least significantly) new qualities or attributes, which could then be classified as new values to stand alongside the old ones. This, however, is clearly not what Nietzsche has in mind, as is attested to by the fact that he devotes little or no time towards trying to invent such things.

For this reason, I think it is fairly clear that Nietzsche should not be understood as using the word 'value' in the manner described above. Instead, what he is really interested in is people's valuations—what they take to be worthwhile or beneficial. Hence, when something is called a value by Nietzsche, this is really shorthand for saying that it is taken to be valuable: to say that compassion is a value for person x, for instance, is equivalent to saying that person x believes compassion to be a laudable quality.¹²

This focus upon human valuations (as opposed to values in some abstract sense) has significant implications for what is meant by the notion of the creation of value. Value creation does not involve the invention or creation of some novel quality intended to fall within a mysterious category of things known as values. Rather, it involves the creation of what Nietzsche calls "a tablet of the good" (Z I: "On a Thousand and One Goals") or a "*rank order of values*" (GM I: Note): something akin to an understanding of which types of things are to be valued positively and which negatively. Therefore, it should be remembered throughout this section that the creation of value is not the creation of a completely new entity, but is more like a redetermining of the value of things that already exist.

In addition to this, Nietzsche's interest in valuations also has another consequence worth mentioning. This is due to the fact that valuations (as opposed to values as we think of them when we use the word 'value' in the abstract sense) are complex and composite—they not only encompass the object (or quality,

¹²As a point of clarity, what I am describing here is two possible ways of using the word 'value', regardless of what one takes value to be. I am not attempting to distinguish between two different understandings of value as such, and a person could use the word value in either (or both) of the ways described here without revealing anything about their stance on the nature of value.

or action etc.) that is valued, but also the reasons that support the pro-attitude shown towards the object, and the affective accompaniments that go alongside all instances of valuation. Because of this complexity, the creation of a new “tablet of the good” is not limited exclusively to simply attributing new levels of value to things. It can also involve valuing things for new reasons, or in new ways. For example, a person who has created a new “tablet of the good” for themselves might continue, in line with their previous values, to regard self-control as an admirable quality, but now for aesthetic rather than moral reasons. Or, similarly, such a person might carry on regarding the works of great thinkers as valuable, but now expresses this through feeling a high-spirited desire to engage with and continue their enterprise, rather than through feelings of reverence and awe which make them stop before these works and simply admire. Hence, another thing that should be borne in mind throughout this section is that the creation of a new “*rank order of values*” is not exhausted by deciding what, from now on, is to be deemed as valuable: it also involves making changes in both the *why* and *how* of our valuations.

The creation of value and the future philosophers

With these preliminary remarks out of the way, it is now time to begin the investigation proper. However, an immediate problem is posed by the fact that Nietzsche seems to employ two distinct and seemingly contradictory notions of value creation throughout his works. According to the first of these, the creation of value is an extremely personal affair: the individual who creates values in this sense does so largely for their own sake, as a means of promoting their own flourishing. As such, they may well deem these values as being useless (or perhaps even potentially harmful) to others who do not share their nature, and will often not see preaching these values to vast multitudes of people as being desirable or fitting. The second conception of value creation, by contrast, seems to point us in a rather different direction. According to this conception, which is especially present throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*,¹³ the creation of

¹³See the section entitled “We Scholars” in particular.

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value is the job of the future philosophers¹⁴—individuals who:

are commanders and legislators: they say “That is how it *should* be!” they are the ones who first determine the “where to?” and “what for?” of people

(BGE 211)

When reading the passages which lend support to this latter conception, the creation of value appears to have little to do with individuals adopting values which enhance their own flourishing. Instead, the task of the creator of values is to form a new system of values for an entire civilization¹⁵ and, seemingly, to create a new universal system of values to replace the existing moral system of which Nietzsche is so critical.

My first aim will therefore be to show that the first, more personal conception of the creation of value is the more fundamental of the two, and hence the one more deserving of our attention, at least when thinking about Nietzsche's autonomy ideal. This task is complicated by the fact that the conception of the future philosophers itself admits of two different readings: one according to which the new philosophers *literally* legislate new values to people, and another according to which they function more along the lines of exemplars—people who live according to new values in such a way that others follow in their footsteps and embrace similar valuations. I will take these two possible interpretations in turn. With the first, I will show that whilst there is good textual evidence for the presence of this view in Nietzsche's works, it does not actually have much bearing on the issue of Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy. I will then argue that the second, more fruitful understanding of the future philosophers is virtually indistinguishable from the first, more personal style of value creation.

¹⁴The phrase ‘the philosophers of the future’ might be preferable to the formulation I have used (‘the future philosophers’) as it brings out more clearly the double meaning intended by Nietzsche, i.e. that these are philosophers of the future both in the sense that they will occur in the future, and in the sense that they are concerned primarily with shaping the future of mankind. In spite of this, I will stick with my formulation as it is less cumbersome. A similar point is also made by Nehamas (1988).

¹⁵Or perhaps for the whole of mankind.

The future philosopher as commander and legislator

In some of the places where Nietzsche discusses value creation, we seem to meet with a view reminiscent of Plato's *Republic*—a new type of philosopher should be entrusted with the structuring and shaping of society, a task including, but also going beyond, the creation of new values. Within these passages, however, the exact method of the structuring and shaping undertaken by the new philosopher is presented in various ways. At certain points, we are given a very hands-on picture of the work of the new philosopher:

The philosopher as *we* understand him, we free spirits—, as the man with the most comprehensive responsibility, whose conscience bears the weight of the overall development of humanity, this philosopher will make use of religion for his breeding and education work, just as he will make use of the prevailing political and economic situation.

(BGE 61)

In passages such as these, Nietzsche seems to imagine the new philosopher as being in a position of some power, with the authority to have a say in issues of breeding and religion, and as using this position to create a new system of values for mankind. In this section, I will argue that this is not the conception of value creation that should focus upon when trying to understand Nietzsche's autonomy ideal.

At this point, it is worth being specific about exactly what I intend to claim and what I do not intend to claim. I will not be arguing that this is a misreading of Nietzsche. As the quote above shows, there are certainly passages in the published works that support this reading. Furthermore, Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks provide even stronger evidence that he gave serious thought to the existence and goals of such philosopher-legislators of future society.¹⁶

Moreover, I will not be arguing that we should disregard this interpretation only because it appears less frequently in the text. As a matter of fact, I think

¹⁶“Discipline and Breeding”, the Book Four of *The Will to Power*, contains some good examples, particularly in the subsection entitled “The Highest Man as Legislator of the Future”. WP 733, where Nietzsche considers some of his own proposals for the future of marriage, is also worth consulting on this point, as is WP 132.

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this is true,¹⁷ and should count as a consideration when judging which conception of value creation to focus upon. However, there are also further reasons, beyond this textual bias, for questioning the idea of the creator of values as some sort of powerful philosopher-legislator.

For one thing, it is initially unclear what content to give to the notion of legislating values. Can such a thing be done? What would it involve? *Prima facie*, at least, values do not seem to be the sort of thing one can legislate—a powerful philosopher-legislator could certainly prohibit or encourage many different actions, practices, institutions and so on, but this would still not really amount to a legislation of values. As Nietzsche himself often tells us, people's valuations become deeply ingrained only through centuries of cultural endeavour, and it is unclear how exactly one could go about legislating to people what their deeply held moral attitudes should be.

We could still grant that this is a possibility. Perhaps if a philosopher-legislator had enough influence over education, religion, politics and so on he could start gradually altering people's moral attitudes and begin legislating a new system of values to replace Christian morality. The work might take a substantial amount of time, but it could at least be begun. Even if we can make sense of the notion of value legislation, however, there are still further problems with this understanding of the creation of value.

These problems are made clear by considering the question: who is the new philosopher supposed to be legislating values for? Presumably, it cannot be simply for everybody, as Nietzsche frequently bemoans the stupidity and harmfulness of having one morality for all.¹⁸ Confronted with this difficulty, it is natural to turn to Nietzsche's frequent classifications of people into 'higher' or 'lower'.¹⁹ Which of these two types of people should the new philosopher be legislating values for? It seems that it definitely cannot be for the higher individuals, as "the requirement that there be a single morality for everyone is harmful precisely to the higher men" (BGE 228). These higher individuals, it

¹⁷And almost certainly so if we only consider the published works.

¹⁸GS 335 and A 11, two passages which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, both provide good examples. For further examples, see BGE 43, 198 and 228.

¹⁹Other pairs of terms, such as 'noble' and 'base', 'strong' and 'weak', or 'great individuals' and 'the herd' could also be used.

seems, each need a separate set of values that will enable them to achieve their highest goals, and can have their gifts crushed if forced to follow a morality designed for all. Granted, Nietzsche believes that our contemporary morality is *particularly* harmful to higher men, due to its promotion of ideals of equality and compassion. But, given the fragility he ascribes to human greatness, and the vastly differing conditions he believes apply to each agent's flourishing, it still seems that any single morality, no matter how much it tailored itself to the promoting of great individuals, could only be harmful on the whole.

So, if the new philosopher is not meant to be legislating values for the higher men, then that really only leaves one option: they are supposed to legislate values for the lower men, or the herd as Nietzsche usually describes them. This seems equally implausible. For one thing, Nietzsche approves of the morality that already exists in the herd. Herd morality is perfectly appropriate for most people. His problem is not with herd morality as such, but rather with the fact that this morality stretches itself out beyond the herd, with detrimental effects to higher men. As far as the herd itself goes though, this morality does a good job. At the most basic level, it prohibits harmful behaviour and prevents members of the herd from doing serious damage to themselves as well as to non-herd members. Beyond this, it also provides a ready tool for allowing members of the herd to beautify their lives—providing ideals of duty, virtue, selflessness, and moderation with which to glorify what Nietzsche would describe as their unremarkable existences. This, in turn, lessens their *ressentiment* towards their life, and also thereby reduces the number of destructive actions that might follow from this feeling of frustration with their place in the world (cf. BGE 61).

So it seems that neither the higher men nor the lower are appropriate targets for the new philosophers when they are legislating values: the higher men each need their own values tailored to their individual natures, and the lower men already have a morality fit for purpose. This analysis is perhaps a little simple, and there might be other options available. Perhaps the new philosophers are supposed to legislate values for the herd, but on a different premise from that currently used. Whereas present herd morality aims at the preservation and enhancement of members of the herd, the new philosophers task might involve legislating a morality for the herd not intended to benefit them, but rather in-

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tended to minimize any negative effects they might have on higher men and potentially even utilize them in enhancing the latter's flourishing. This sort of viewpoint seems to be supported by passages such as the following from the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*:

The *sickly* are the greatest danger to man: *not* the wicked, *not* the “beasts of prey”... there could be no greater or more disastrous misunderstanding than for the happy, the successful, those powerful in body and soul to begin to doubt their *right to happiness* in this way. Away with this “world turned upside down”! Away with this disgraceful mollycoddling of feeling! That the sick should *not* make the healthy sick—and this would be that kind of mollycoddling—ought to be the chief concern on earth:—but for that, it is essential that the healthy should remain separated from the sick, should even be spared the sight of the sick so that they do not confuse themselves with the sick.

(GM III: 14)

Once we remember the equation of the majority with the ‘sick’ that is being employed here,²⁰ a familiar Nietzschean theme becomes audible: the danger posed to the higher men by the values of the herd. Given this danger, it might be fair to speculate that the role of the new philosopher is to legislate values for the majority in such a way as to make them less dangerous (and perhaps even useful)²¹ to the “*strokes of luck*” (GM III: 14) that are the higher men. Exactly how this would work is not immediately obvious, but one possible idea might be that the task of the new philosophers is to enforce a Nietzschean dictum from *The Will to Power*, namely to ensure that “The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd—but not reach out beyond it” (WP 287). If this were the case, then the problem of neither the higher or lower men seeming to be appropriate targets for new values would be avoided.

This proposal clearly brings fresh questions: how hard and fast is the distinction between higher and lower men? Are there borderline cases? How should these be treated? Can lower men become higher men and vice versa? Is the difference only one of degree and not of type? How are the new philosophers

²⁰The passage begins: “The more normal this sickliness is in man—and we cannot dispute this normality”.

²¹Nietzsche's remarks on the necessity of slavery to higher culture might belong here.

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supposed to reliably distinguish between the higher and lower men? Even if they can distinguish, how are they meant to ensure that the new values they legislate to the majority do not also filter through to the higher men?

I do not intend to tackle any of these questions here. This line of enquiry has, I think, been brought far enough to illustrate my point. Whilst I still do not want to deny that support for the idea of such philosopher-legislators can be found in Nietzsche's works, it is clear that the further we press on in this area, the more it involves us in questions concerning the value and practicability of philosopher rulers, and the less relevant it becomes to the issue of Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy. Hence, whether or not this idea of philosopher-legislators can be made ultimately viable, I do not think it provides a particularly fruitful line of investigation in the context of an investigation into the role the creation of value plays in Nietzsche's post-moral autonomy ideal.

The future philosopher and the philosophical laborer

Not all of the passages concerning the future philosophers imply that they need to wield such an inordinate amount of political power to perform the task of value creation. The majority admit of a far more moderate reading, in which the job of the new philosopher is not to literally *legislate* new values, but rather simply to be their originator—the first person to posit, and more importantly to live by, a new set of values. This line of Nietzsche's thought is captured particularly well by the wording of the following description given of the future philosophers:

Ultimately, they have to do more than just to know—they have to *be* something new, *mean* something new, and *present* new values!

(BGE 253)

When trying to get to grips with this more moderate picture, it is helpful first to look at another type of philosopher that Nietzsche describes in direct opposition to the future philosophers: the “philosophical laborers”:

I am going to insist that people finally stop mistaking philosophical laborers and scientific men in general for philosophers,—that here, of all places, people be

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strict about giving “each his due” and not too much to the one, and much too little to the other. . . The project for philosophical laborers on the noble model of Kant and Hegel is to establish some large class of given values (which is to say: values that were once *posited* and created but have come to dominate and have been called “truths” for a long time) and press it into formulas, whether in the realm of *logic* or *politics* (morality) or *art*. It is up to these researchers to make everything that has happened or been valued so far look clear, obvious, comprehensible, and managable, to abbreviate everything long, even “time” itself, and to *overwhelm* the entire past. . . True philosophers reach for the future with a creative hand and everything that is and was becomes a means, a tool, a hammer for them.

(BGE 211)

The idea that Kant and Hegel’s purpose is to make things “clear, obvious, comprehensible, and managable” might be classed as grounds for suspecting a Nietzschean joke here, but the rest of the passage makes it clear that Nietzsche is being serious. Moreover, the idea is pretty straightforward: true philosophers are those that first posit new valuations, and philosophical laborers are those who follow in their footsteps, dedicating their lives to providing endless justifications and elaborations of the system of values that has been created. I take it there is no need to ask whether the future philosophers will be true philosophers, or merely philosophical laborers.

This more minimal conception of the future philosophers clearly avoids many of the problems of the more radical reading. As the new philosophers no longer need to be conceived as possessing any sort of political authority, all the questions regarding the principles upon which society are to be structured, as well as those questions related to the possibility of literally legislating values, simply disappear. Similarly, the difficulties with who the values are supposed to target also fall away when the future philosophers are no longer seen as directly enforcing their values on anybody other than themselves.

As these difficulties fall away, however, the gap between the type of value creation undertaken by the future philosophers and the more personal style of value creation also reduces significantly. Now both cases essentially involve an individual creating and living by a new set of values, without having the

means (or often even the desire) to force these values onto other people. In other words, when the passages concerning the future philosophers are not interpreted as arguing for the necessity of philosopher-rulers who will shape the future of mankind in accordance with their own will, they no longer seem to be suggesting anything radically different from the passages which recommend a more personal style of value creation specifically to the individual.

At this point, it may be suggested that my use of the phrase ‘radically different’ has actually done a lot of my work for me here, for though there may not be radical differences between the sanitized version of the future philosopher and the individual creating a personal set of values, there are still some noteworthy differences nonetheless. The sanitized future philosopher, for example, whilst *ex hypothesi* not having the power to enforce his values on others, may well still aim to create values that will be taken on by people other than themselves, whereas the individual creating their own values seems, according to the preliminary understanding I have sketched thus far, to only be concerned with creating values specifically tailored to their own needs. Similarly, the individual creating their own set of values seems, once again according to the preliminary understanding developed so far, to have a definite goal in the creation of their values—i.e. their own flourishing. The future philosopher, on the other hand, need not have this or indeed any other such specific goal as their aim. All that is important is that they are the originator of new values, and there is no specific purpose which they must conceive as determining the values that they choose.

These differences are not actually as major as they first appear to be though, and if they reveal anything it is the deficiencies in the preliminary understanding of personal value creation that have been employed so far. The reason for this is that the creation of value, at least as far as Nietzsche is concerned, does not necessarily have to be engaged in deliberately and consciously. In other words, a person doesn’t have to set out with the explicit aim of creating a personal set of values which will enhance their own flourishing in order to arrive at one. Moreover the result, i.e. a higher degree of autonomy, is the same regardless of how the personalized set of values has been arrived at. Hence the differences that I noted a moment ago between the (moderately conceived) future philosopher and the creator of personal values all disappear. This is because these differences

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all relate to the *intention* with which the individual was creating their values, and as my last point has shown, there are no specific intentions which actually need to be attributed to every creator of values *per se*.²² Therefore, if these differences are significant at all, it is only as differences between the future philosopher and the individual who is *self-consciously* and *deliberately* creating a personal set of values, and not as differences between the future philosopher and the creator of personal values as such.

The creator of values as new, unique and incomparable

Thus far, I hope to have shown that the points where Nietzsche associates the creation of value with the new philosophers are not the most illuminating when considering the relationship between value creation and autonomy. When these passages are read in their most extreme light, they have little relevance to this topic, and lead us only into questions regarding the structuring of an ideal Nietzschean society. When they are read more moderately, however, these sections seem to almost collapse into the more personal style of value creation that Nietzsche discusses elsewhere in his works. In this section, my aim will be to investigate exactly what this more personal conception of value creation entails.

The idea that certain individuals should create new values is commonly associated with Nietzsche's thought. This is frequently fleshed out along the following lines: Nietzsche believes that higher individuals should avoid accepting any system of values which claims to apply to everyone, and instead create their own values, values which are taken to be somehow more expressive of their own nature or more amenable to their flourishing as an individual. Though points related to this way of looking at value creation are scattered throughout Nietzsche's works, there are two passages in particular which explicitly treat value creation against the backdrop of claims about the harmfulness of taking any moral prescription to be universal, GS 335 and A 111. Here, as the shorter of the two examples, is the passage from *The Antichrist*:

One more word against Kant as a *moralist*. A virtue needs to be our *own* invention, our *own* most personal need and self-defence: in any other sense, a virtue is

²²This is will also crop up in the next chapter.

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just dangerous. Whatever is not a condition for life *harms* it. . . “Virtue”, “duty”, “goodness in itself”, goodness that has been stamped with the character of the impersonal and universally valid—these are the fantasies and manifestations of decline, of the final exhaustion of life, of the Königsberg Chinesianity. The most basic laws of preservation and growth require the opposite: that everyone should invent his *own* virtues, his *own* categorical imperatives.

(A 11)

Aside from being the two passages which give the most detailed exposition of the relation between value creation and the harmfulness of (supposedly) universally applicable moral judgements, however, these passages also have something else in common: they both begin with discussions of Kant’s ethics. Now while I do not want to claim that this was a calculated move on Nietzsche’s part, I do think that it is telling that both of Nietzsche’s most clearly stated calls for the creation of new values emerge from thinking about Kant’s moral philosophy. For this reason, I want to undertake a brief comparison of Kant’s and Nietzsche’s views.

Accounts of the ethical views of either of the two thinkers involved here can, and indeed have, easily fill entire books, so I will have to limit my enquiry in a number of ways. Most obviously, the level of detail I go into will be that which is necessary for the comparison which I am trying to make, and not that which would be expected from an in-depth commentary on Kant’s moral philosophy. Also, given that both Kant and Nietzsche addressed a wide variety of topics falling within the domain of moral philosophy, I will also need to set a limit on which content I discuss. The obvious way to set this limit is to look for the parts of Kant’s thought which address the same issues that Nietzsche is concerned with in the passages where he discusses value creation. Now Kant himself does not focus primarily on the concept of value, and certainly not on the creation of value, so any straightforward comparison is out of the question. The area that is in question here though, I believe, and which I therefore want to look at, is what we can think of as the *source of authority* of any ethical demands which we should recognize as binding upon ourselves.

Given how frequently Nietzsche attacks Kant, it might be thought that the only insight such a comparison could confer would be a negative one: by fully

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understanding where Kant thinks the authority of morality derives from, we are given the picture of the polar opposite of the Nietzsche's view, which can then be understood as a kind of negative image in relation to the original Kantian model. This, however, will not be my purpose in drawing the comparison. Rather, my claim will be that, in spite of the obvious differences, there are actually many crucial similarities between Kant's and Nietzsche's ethical views on this point, and that understanding both these similarities and these differences can help us get a firmer grip on what Nietzsche understands by the creation of value.

To begin with, it is worth noting that there is a certain sense in which both thinkers share the same starting point: they both reject the idea that the authority of ethical demands comes from a source outside of man. The constraints that certain ethical demands impose on our behaviour are not a function of the power of some sort of external commander who issues them to us, nor are they derived from some sort of moral structure inherent in the fabric of reality which we intuit in some mysterious way. Instead, they both try and show how it is something in (or better about) ourselves which gives authority to certain ethical considerations.

Kant's method for achieving this goal, in broad outline, is to argue that "morality serves as a law for us only as rational beings" (1997, p.53). In other words, it is because of the fact that we possess *rationality* that we find ourselves bound by the moral law. This is not something necessarily particular to human beings, in Kant's eyes, rather *any* rational being, human or otherwise, would be bound by the same moral law.

The particular idea of the moral law that Kant puts forward, the categorical imperative, is one of the most famous pieces of moral philosophy of all time, and there is no need to rehearse either what it states or the nature of Kant's particular arguments for it in detail here. Instead, what I want to look at is the picture of the human subject that complements Kant's notion of the moral law.

As already stated, Kant believes that we are all rational beings. This, furthermore, implies that we have what Kant calls a "*will*":

Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*. Since *reason* is

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required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason.

(Kant, 1997, p.24)

On Kant's picture then, to have a will is to have the capacity to act in accordance with rational principles, or in accordance with "imperatives" (1997, p.25) as Kant also calls them. This is not the whole story, however, and, in human beings at least, rational principles are not always the determining ground of the will. The following passage from the *Groundwork*, which follows hot on the heels of Kant's definition of will as practical reason, demonstrates this point well:

If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary, that is, the will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good. However, if reason solely by itself does not adequately determine the will; if the will is exposed also to subjective conditions (certain incentives) that are not always in accord with the objective ones; in a word, if the will is not *in itself* completely in conformity with reason (as is actually the case with human beings), then actions that are cognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent

(Kant, 1997, p.24)

In possessing a will, then, human beings have the *capacity* to act on the basis of what reason commands as "practically necessary". This does not, however, mean that rational considerations are always, as a matter of fact, the determining ground of the will. Rather, the will is also capable of being determined by "certain incentives" which can directly contradict that which is demanded by reason alone—namely, by inclinations.

This distinction between a person acting from inclination on the one hand, and "only by laws which he gives to himself through reason" (1956, p.101) on the other, is crucial to Kant's moral philosophy. As is well known, the consequences of an action are not what determines its value in the Kantian system. Rather, it all depends upon the motive that caused the action: when a person

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acts on the basis of what reason commands “independently of inclination” their action is both autonomous and in conformity with the moral law. To the extent that their action arises from inclination, by contrast, it is heteronomous and lacking in true moral worth.

It is Kant's use of the terms autonomous and heteronomous that is particularly interesting here. Why are actions that are performed in accordance with the dictates of reason autonomous, but actions done from inclination not? After all, both inclination and reason are aspects of the human being capable of influencing the will, on Kant's theory. In both cases, therefore, we seem to have instances of an aspect of the self determining the will, and therefore we should have autonomy rather than heteronomy.

This aspect of Kant's thought becomes even more puzzling if we consider some of the intricacies of Kant's theory. On first inspection, it might seem as if there is a simple solution to this issue: when we act according to reason, our actions arise from us in a way that is in some sense spontaneous or uncaused. When we obey our inclinations, on the other hand, our actions are causally determined by our strongest bodily desire. This solution, however, completely contradicts Kant's account. For Kant, the issue is far more complex than this. When considered in relation to their “empirical character” every action a person performs, whether autonomous or heteronomous, is causally determined—“in regard to this empirical character there is no freedom” (1998, p.541). Considered as an appearance, then, all of a person's actions, whatever motive they stem from, are part of the causal order and hence are determined entirely by antecedent factors. When considered in relation to their “intelligible character”, on the other hand, a person's will must be “declared free of all influences of sensibility and determination by appearances” (1998, p.537). Hence, considered as the *author* of their deeds, all of a person's actions, whether autonomous or heteronomous, arise through the “spontaneity” (1998, p.533) of the person's will—and whether the maxim of their action is based on the demands of reason alone, or on those of their inclinations, their will forms this maxim “without needing to be preceded by any other cause” (1998, p.533) and hence should not be seen as determined by antecedent events. Given this, it becomes even more puzzling that Kant does not see *both* actions based on rational considerations

and actions performed through inclination as expressing autonomy, in so far as the person is considered in relation to their intelligible character.²³

The reason why this is not so, on Kant's theory, is because of what we might call his 'thin' conception of the human being *qua* practical reasoner. According to this conception, the human being, as the performer of their actions at least, is a rational will and nothing more.²⁴ And this amounts, basically, to the claim that what we might think of as the 'true self' or 'essence' of any human being is their pure, rational will—with all other elements of themselves, and most notably the (presumably bodily) sources of their inclinations, being excluded. This is why, for Kant, to act according to "reason alone" is to act autonomously, i.e. out of one's own true nature, and to act according to other types of motive (which Kant would classify as inclinations) is to be heteronomous, i.e. to spontaneously base the maxims of one's actions on something external to one's self conceived as a rational will.

The reason why Kant takes the rational will to be something along the lines of the essence of the individual is not always clear, and he sometimes seems to argue the point in the opposite direction from the one I am taking now: in other words, he argues *from* from the fact that we recognize the absolute authority of morality *to* the claim that spontaneous rationality must be our true nature in order for us to have this recognition. In spite of this, however, some clues may be given by an illuminating discussion from the *Critique of Practical Reason*. There, in the "Analytic of Pure Practical Reason", he tackles the question of how to reconcile the "causality of freedom" he attributes to the agent as practical reasoner with the "causality of necessity" (1956, p.97) that functions everywhere in the natural world. And the answer he gives, in short, is that there is no contradiction here at all. This is because, according to Kant, the human agent *qua* practical reasoner is not a part of the phenomenal realm that is the natural world, but is rather "the intelligible substrate in us" (1956,

²³An admirably clear account of Kant's distinction between the empirical and the intelligible character of a rational being can be found in Allison's *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. See Ch. 2 in particular.

²⁴This is to be contrasted, on Kant's theory, with the conception of the human being *qua* object of natural science, which states that all of their actions arise from "natural necessity" (1956, p.101).

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p.103). Here is how Kant puts the point:

natural necessity, which cannot coexist with the freedom of the subject, attaches merely to the determinations of a thing which stands under the conditions of time, and consequently applies only to the acting subject as appearance. . . But the same subject, which, on the other hand, is conscious also of its existence as a thing-in-itself, also views his existence so far as it does not stand under temporal conditions, and to himself as determinable only by laws which he gives to himself through reason. In this existence, nothing is antecedent to the determination of his will; every action and, in general, every changing determination of his existence according to inner sense, even the entire history of his existence as a sensuous being, is seen in the consciousness of his intelligible existence as only a consequence, not as a determining ground of his causality as a noumenon.

(Kant, 1956, p.101)

This, then, is Kant's solution to "the apparent contradiction between the mechanism of nature and freedom" (1956, p.101): natural necessity only pertains to the subject as appearance, whereas freedom "depends upon the spontaneity of the subject as a thing-in-itself" (1956, p.103). Hence, for Kant, the rational will present in us all is not merely one feature of ourselves amongst others—rather it is our "intelligible existence": it is ourselves conceived as "a noumenon" and as a "thing-in-itself".

This also, in my view, goes a long way towards explaining why, for Kant, the moral law has the authority that it does over us. Given his thin conception of the agent *qua* practical reasoner, to act in accordance with the moral law (and thereby in accordance with the dictates of pure reason) is to act in accordance with the ethical demands that flow from one's true nature: i.e. to act in accordance with the aspect of one's self that is "a cause independent of all sensibility" and that is "the causality of that appearance" (1956, p.101) which each person finds themselves to be in the phenomenal world.

The passages from Nietzsche's works which I quoted above (GS 335 and A 11), I want to claim, are directed at this same question of where the authority of ethical demands derives from. Moreover, the answer they give is basically the same: the constraints that exist upon what we must (or must not) do or value

follow from our own nature as agents. The crucial difference, however, lies in what they take this nature to consist in.

For Kant, as was described above, the agent *qua* practical reasoner is a pure rational will and nothing more. Nietzsche, on the other hand, has what we might think of as a much *thicker* conception of which aspects of the human being are relevant for ethical reasoning. He does not isolate some ‘metaphysical core’²⁵ of human beings and then exclude every other aspect of their nature from playing any significant positive role in ethical reasoning. Rather, the ethically relevant unit for Nietzsche is the whole natural agent.

Hence, for Nietzsche, it is not the rationality of our agency that dictates what we must and must not value. Instead, it is what “the most basic laws of preservation and growth” prescribe for each agent, given the *particular* structure of their drives and affects. This point is brought out well by the passage concerning value creation from *The Gay Science*, which I will now quote from at some length:

What? You admire the categorical imperative within you? This firmness of your so-called moral judgement? This absoluteness of the feeling, “here everyone must judge as I do”? Rather admire your *selfishness* here! And the blindness, pettiness, and simplicity of your selfishness! For it is selfish to consider one’s own judgement a universal law, and this selfishness is blind, petty, and simple because it shows that you haven’t yet discovered yourself or created for yourself an ideal of your very own—for this could never be someone else’s, let alone everyone’s, everyone’s! No one who judges, “in this case everyone would act like this” has yet taken five steps towards self-knowledge. For he would then know that there neither are nor can be actions that are all the same; that every act ever performed was done in an altogether unique and unrepeatable way, and that this will be true of every future act; that all prescriptions of action (even the most inward and subtle rules of all moralities so far) relate only to their rough exterior; that these prescriptions may yield an appearance of sameness, *but only just an appear-*

²⁵I put this phrase in scare quotes as it may seem to some people to suggest something along the lines of the “two-world” reading of Kant’s transcendental idealism, rather than the (I take it) more plausible “two-aspect” (Allison, 1990, p.4) reading advocated by commentators such as Allison (1990) and Korsgaard (1996). This is certainly not my intention, however, and I take it that both interpretations of Kant’s philosophy need to see the rational will as something along these lines in order to account for his claim that spontaneously acting according to reason alone results in autonomy, whereas incorporating the demands of other motives into one’s imperatives results in heteronomy.

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ance. . . our opinions, valuations, and tables of what is good are certainly some of the most powerful levers in the machinery of our actions, but that in each case, the law of its mechanism is unprovable. Let us therefore *limit* ourselves to the purification of our opinions and value judgements and to the *creation of tables of what is good that are new and all our own*. . . We, however, want to *become who we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves! To that end we must become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to be creators in this sense—while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been built on *ignorance* of physics or in *contradiction* to it. So, long live physics!

(GS 335)

This passage contains a great deal of material, and it would be impractical to deal with it all here. For that reason, I propose to split the passage into three parts.

The first part (which runs up to the words “No one who judges, ‘in this case everyone would act like this’”) gives a pretty good example of Nietzsche’s attitude towards the categorical imperative, and shows once again that Nietzsche seems to make some sort of connection between Kant’s philosophy and the creation of value.

The second part (which runs from “No one who judges” up to “our opinions, valuations, and tables of what is good are certainly some of the most powerful levers in the machinery of our actions”) then complicates things slightly. Here, Nietzsche gives an argument intended show that all universal prescriptions of action are in some sense illegitimate or overly simplistic. This argument proceeds by attacking one of the underlying assumptions of universal prescriptions of action, namely that it makes sense to group different actions together under a single description: as being *fraudulent*, for example, or as being *compassionate*. This, Nietzsche seems to be implying, is to ignore important differences between the particular circumstances the actions were performed in and, perhaps more importantly, between the driving forces that led the agent in question to perform the action.

This is a somewhat puzzling argument. For one thing, if it works it seems to have serious repercussions for Nietzsche’s other claims in this section. This

is because it would apply equally to the laws that Nietzsche recommends people give to themselves, and not only to universal moral rules. After all, if the “laws” Nietzsche imagines that some people will “give themselves” are to be laws in any recognizable sense, they must have application beyond single highly specified incidents. In fact, given the stress Nietzsche lays on individuals choosing values that “*are new and all [their] own*”, it seems somewhat as if Nietzsche has chosen to target the wrong aspect of universal moral prescriptions—it is the fact that they treat all *people* as being similar that would seem to be the more natural core of his objection, rather than the fact that they assume the possibility of classing different actions together into broad categories.

I don’t think there is any indisputable way to resolve this puzzle, but one suggestion might be to draw on the reaction that Nietzsche suggests we should have to the realization that universal moral prescriptions group actions together in an illegitimate fashion. According to the passage in question, the appropriate response to this sort of consideration is to stop worrying about moral rules that go beyond the sphere of our own actions, and “*limit ourselves*” to the smaller task of improving the laws and values that we apply to ourselves. Given this, it is possible that Nietzsche’s argument runs something along the following lines: any rule of action, whether universal *or* specific to a particular individual, is beset by incredible difficulties due to the highly unique, specific, and essentially “unknowable” (GS 335) nature of every action. Therefore, we should give up the more ambitious task of creating rules that will be applicable to everyone, and concentrate on the more manageable (although admittedly still extremely difficult) task of creating a set of rules and values that are appropriate for ourselves individually.

After this argument comes the final section of the passage (running from “our opinions, valuations, and tables of what is good” onwards). It is this section which contains the material that I am really interested in here. At this point, Nietzsche is satisfied that he has shown the erroneousness of accepting the claims of any system of values to be universally valid, and has moved on to a new question: what values should we endorse in the place of those which falsely claim to be universally applicable? Nietzsche’s immediate answer to this question is that we should “*limit ourselves to the purification of our opinions*

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and value judgements and to the *creation of tables of what is good that are new and all our own*".

Thankfully this is not all the detail we get from Nietzsche in this passage, and his point is filled out in more detail a few lines further along, where we are given some clues about both the aims and the methods of those people who create "*tables of what is good that are new and all [their] own*". Their aim, we are told, is to become who they are, individuals who are "unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves". In addition to this, we are also told about the means that they will use to achieve this goal: "To that end we must become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to be creators in this sense—while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been built on *ignorance* of physics or in *contradiction* to it".

Neither the aims nor the method attributed to the creators of value in this passage are in any sense obvious, and it is still somewhat perplexing what Nietzsche means here. Yet, despite not using the same biologicistic language here as in the passage from *The Antichrist*, I think the point Nietzsche is making in both places is essentially the same—that what is valuable for us are those things which are "condition for life" for beings such as ourselves, things that accord with our "most basic laws of preservation and growth".

To make this claim sound plausible, we have to make two assumptions. Firstly, that becoming who you are, in Nietzsche's specialist sense, can be roughly equated with maximizing your flourishing as a specifically constituted natural being. Secondly, it also involves assuming that when Nietzsche talks about "physics" here, he is being somewhat figurative. He does not literally mean that the creator of values must have an in-depth knowledge of modern physics, rather he is using this term as shorthand for the study of "everything lawful and necessary in the world", somewhat like the way the term was used in the ancient Greek world, to designate the study of everything that occurs—physics as opposed to metaphysics, rather than physics as opposed to, say, biology.

If we grant these two relatively plausible sounding assumptions though, both of the passages by Nietzsche under discussion seem to converge on a common

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message: accepting the dictates of any universal system of values is (at least potentially) harmful, and that we should therefore create our own values, and that what these values should be is determined by what enhances our flourishing, enables us to “become who we are”, or acts as “a condition for life” for ourselves as unique individuals.

If this analysis is correct, then it seems that both Kant and Nietzsche use a very similar tactic to show that some ethical demands really do have authority over us, despite the fact that they have no external or supernatural source. Both thinkers agree that these demands are something that we must legislate for ourselves, and both agree that they follow somehow from our nature as agents. The major difference, it seems to me at least, is that Nietzsche has a much thicker, person-specific picture of what really belongs to each person *qua* practical reasoner.

It should be noted that this disagreement does still warrant the term ‘major’, as much turns on it. For example, it is an important premise in the Kantian system that, when considered as practical reasoners, people are all fundamentally alike. For Nietzsche, by contrast, it is ethically relevant that each individual represents a unique arrangement of drives and affects, and is hence not identical to anyone else, let alone everyone. This difference has significant consequences. In the Kantian system, due to the fact that everyone (*qua* practical reasoner) is identical, the ethical demands that their rational nature places on them are the same for everyone. There is only one moral law, and it applies to all rational beings. With Nietzsche’s view, on the other hand, each different person is unique, and hence the values which express the “most basic laws of preservation and growth” for them will differ accordingly.

Along the same lines, this difference between Nietzsche’s and Kant’s views also has serious repercussions for the degree of knowledge we can have about the constraints on what we can and can’t value. For Kant, the moral law is the expression of reason, and as such the restrictions that it places on what people can (or at least should) do can be known fully by anyone who reasons correctly. In fact, there is even a direct question one can ask oneself as a test: can I will the maxim of my action while at the same time willing it as a universal law? For Nietzsche, by contrast, the values that a person should adopt are determined

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by facts about their own unique constitution, as well as by facts about what the effects of adopting particular valuations will be upon that constitution. Neither of these two factors can ever be known fully, hence the Nietzschean creator of values will, unlike the Kantian agent, have to engage in some pretty hard work (indeed, they will have to “become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world”) in order to make any headway at all in the search for the set of values which will allow them to become who they are.

In addition to the previous two points discussed, the difference between the Kantian and Nietzschean agent also has another significant consequence worth noting, relating to the stability of the values adopted over time. For Kant, the basic constitution of any agent will remain fundamentally the same throughout their whole life—every agent is a rational free will,²⁶ and only death, or a condition which seriously hampers their mental faculties, can change this. For this reason, the values and rules which they must endorse will remain the same throughout their whole life, so long as they are still in a position to endorse any values or follow any rules at all. According to the story Nietzsche gives us, by contrast, each person is made up of a vast number of disparate and often conflicting elements, each delicately balanced in constantly shifting power relations with the others, causing some to grow and expand in their power and strength, while others wither and fall away. Due to this agonal nature of the drives, the constitution of individuals is constantly changing over time as well. This, in turn, means that the values which will most effectively enhance their flourishing may also change over time in relation to these changes in their makeup. Hence, for the Nietzschean creator of values as opposed to the Kantian ethical agent, the values and laws one must give to one's self are not eternal and unalterable. Rather, they will need to gradually be edited and amended in as much as the agent who created them has undergone growth and change.

Aside from this difference between the agents that they plug into their respective systems, however, there is still much that Nietzsche and Kant have in common regarding this issue. They both agree that people must give their values to themselves, and that the way in which they do so should be a reflection

²⁶Once again, *qua* practical reasoner.

of their nature as agents.

Viewing the creation of value like this can also help to dispel a possible misconception that an extremely casual (or indeed purely second hand) acquaintance with Nietzsche's philosophy can sometimes give rise to, which goes roughly along these lines: Nietzsche believes that, in light of the death of God, we can no longer believe in the existence of objective values. Therefore, there are no constraints on what we can or should value, and we are at liberty to create any values that we like, based on any reasons we choose, or even based on no reasons at all.

If the analysis I have given of Nietzsche's view here is correct, then this is not the best way to understand what he takes the creation of value to involve. Rather, as the passage from *The Gay Science* indicates, Nietzsche believes that the creation of value involves detailed investigation into the effects values have on us, and is heavily constrained by facts both about ourselves as agents as well as about the effects on our flourishing that holding certain valuations might have.

This theme of the importance of detailed investigation is not only present in "Long Live Physics!"²⁷ It permeates much of Nietzsche's thought concerning the creation of value, as this passage from the *Genealogy* suggests: "All sciences must, from now on, prepare the way for the future work of the philosopher: this work being understood to mean that the philosopher has to solve the *problem of values* and that he has to decide on the *rank order of values*" (GM I: Note). If anything, the passage from *The Gay Science* is unique in putting so much stress on the sort of causal knowledge that can be provided specifically by physics, in Nietzsche's extended sense of the word. As Nietzsche's thought develops, however, and particularly after he refines his doctrine of perspectivism, he increasingly recommends an ever wider range of disciplines to those who would create values. The following statement from *Beyond Good and Evil* provides a particularly good case in point:

Perhaps the philosopher has had to be a critic and a skeptic and dogmatist and historian and, moreover, a poet and collector and traveller and guesser of riddles and moralist and seer and "free spirit" and practically everything, in order to run

²⁷The passage from *The Gay Science* under discussion.

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through the range of human values and value feelings and *be able* to gaze with many eyes and consciences from the heights into every distance, from the corner onto every expanse. But all these are only preconditions for his task: the task itself has another will,—it calls for him to *create values*.

(BGE 211)

Therefore, in spite of the initial impressions that the notion of value creation can easily leave us with, it should be remembered that this process is less like a free act of creation in a valueless void, and more like a labour-intensive and wide ranging investigation into the sort of values or laws that will be conducive to the flourishing of the individual in question, given the type of natural creature that they are, and the different consequences that can be discerned of holding certain valuations.

Remaining questions

The account I have given so far matches up well with the passages I have been looking at (GS 335 and A 11 most particularly), but there are a few questions that still need to be answered in order to broaden its scope beyond what is said merely in these few passages.

Firstly, there seems to be something of a contradiction between the description of the creation of value I have just given and the argument I used on pages 73–74. In the account just given, I depicted value creation as being a highly labour-intensive task, with the main aim of the person involved in it being to discover/create the set of values which will, to the best of their knowledge, most effectively enhance their flourishing. Earlier, on the other hand, when discussing the differences (or lack thereof) between the individual creator of values and the moderately conceived future philosopher, I claimed that the creation of a personalized set of values need not, in Nietzsche's eyes, be done for any specific reason, or indeed be engaged in deliberately and intentionally at all. Clearly something needs to be said about this tension.

The first thing to be said is that there is clearly textual evidence for both points of view. In the passage from *The Gay Science* which was discussed at length in the previous section, Nietzsche claimed that those who would create

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values “must become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world: [they] must become *physicists* in order to be creators in this sense”. Similarly, the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* quoted at the very end of the previous section (BGE 211) also strongly suggests that the creation of value is a task one deliberately engages in, and moreover a task that requires a great deal of knowledge and preparatory work.

Some passages suggest the exact opposite though. Perhaps the most famous of these comes from *Ecce Homo*, where Nietzsche famously claims that “[b]ecoming what you are presupposes that you do not have the slightest idea *what you are*” (EH: “Why I am so Clever”, 9).²⁸ This passage does not explicitly discuss either value creation or personalized ethics, but the central notion of “[b]ecoming what you are” is what provides the crucial link which allows the tension here to rise to the surface.

As was seen in the discussion of GS 335, Nietzsche himself sees some sort of connection between the creation of value and becoming who/what you are. In fact, those who he suggests should become the “best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world” are precisely those who “want to *become who [they] are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves”. It is here that the tension arises, for in this earlier passage becoming who you are is pictured as the result of exactly the sort of labour-intensive and highly cognitive process that I described in the previous section—in other words, as involving a detailed investigation into the effects of holding different values, and as also involving the creation of new “*tables of what is good*” based primarily, if not exclusively, upon this investigation. The passage from *Ecce Homo*, on the other hand, seems to suggest that this is exactly how *not* to become who one is. One must not, according to this passage, deliberately and consciously attempt to control and direct one’s life, but rather one must keep one’s consciousness “free from all of the great imperatives” so that “the organizing, governing ‘idea’” can get “the *individual* qualities and virtues ready”, and all this must happen without the individual in question having “any clue as to the domineering task, the ‘goal’, the ‘purpose’, the ‘meaning’” (EH: “Why I am so Clever”, 9). If this is Nietzsche’s considered

²⁸This issue was also touched upon in the previous chapter.

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picture of how to become who one is, then it seems that the sort of picture of value creation that I painted in the previous section, and with it my more general claim about the relationship between ethics and autonomy, cannot be correct.

In general though, I think this conclusion would be a little too strong. For whilst Nietzsche's use of the phrase 'has to' in the sentence "The whole surface of consciousness. . . has to be kept free from all of the great imperatives" suggests necessity, I think the passage as a whole makes it clear that what Nietzsche is doing here is more accurately seen as giving a description (and a highly flattering one at that) of his own development, rather than actually stating any sort of universal rule that everybody must follow in order to become who they are. His case may be illuminating in many ways, and obviously teaches the lesson that becoming who you are need not *necessarily* involve explicitly formulating and following any sort of goal, purpose, or ethic (although one must be present at some level). However, to conclude from this one case (and indeed from this one passage) that all becoming who one is must follow this general pattern is clearly a mistake that we should not make, and ideally, one we should not attribute to Nietzsche if we do not need to. To do so would be to conflate the process of becoming who one is with the process of becoming who Nietzsche was.

In the final analysis, therefore, I think the best option is to allow that the ethic which guides one's actions can be either the result of sustained enquiry or the subconscious work of some master drive, and that both of these options can have the same overall result, i.e. the agent in question achieving autonomy and becoming who they are.

The next question that needs to be answered concerns the claims I made about the differences between Nietzsche's and Kant's understanding of the human being *qua* practical reasoner. When characterizing Nietzsche's position on this issue, I claimed that he had a thicker notion of the practical agent than Kant, whereby the specific rank order of drives and affects that constitutes an individual's nature heavily constrains which choices they should make and which values they should endorse.²⁹ And this implies that, at the level of description appropriate for ethical reasoning, there is no single shared human nature which

²⁹If they are to become who they are, at least.

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could ground a single shared human ethic binding on all people. This sort of claim though, seems to ignore one important point: that we are all, according to Nietzsche, will to power.

There are several passages that seem to suggest that the will to power can be the basis of some form of ethical standpoint for Nietzsche, but perhaps none does so more forcefully than the following passage from the beginning of *The Anti-Christ*:

What is good?—Everything that enhances people’s feeling of power, will to power, power itself.

What is bad?—Everything stemming from weakness.

What is happiness?—The feeling that power is *growing*, that some resistance has been overcome.

Not contentedness, but more power; *not* peace, but war; *not* virtue, but prowess (virtue in the style of the Renaissance, *virtù*, moraline-free virtue).

(A 2)

Taken at face value, this passage seems to suggest that the theory of the will to power can provide some sort of straightforward criterion for what is to be deemed good and what is to be deemed bad. If we take this suggestion seriously, Nietzsche’s ethics start to resemble someone like Bentham’s, only with power replacing pleasure. Nietzsche would be proposing that (i) all human actions are, as a matter of fact, caused by the pursuit of power and (ii) that, due to this, what makes an action right/good or wrong/bad is the degree to which it promotes or diminishes power. In other words, Nietzsche would be proposing some sort of power-consequentialism on the basis of a descriptive claim about human nature, i.e. that every action is motivated by will to power.

This sort of view is not entirely misguided, and Nietzsche certainly does sometimes talk in this way. When properly understood, however, this aspect of Nietzsche’s thinking does not actually stand in any sort of tension with the claims I have made so far. To understand why this is so, it will be necessary to make a couple of remarks about Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will to power.

There are many different possible understandings of both the content and importance of Nietzsche’s will to power theory, and there is no need to in-

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investigate the intricacies of all their agreements and disagreements here.³⁰ As a starting point for my own discussion, here is a characteristic statement of the main import of the doctrine from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Physiologists should think twice before positing the drive for self-preservation as the cardinal drive of an organic being. Above all, a living thing wants to *discharge* its strength—life itself is will to power

(BGE 13)

As was hinted at above, commentators have fleshed out this position in a variety of ways. Clark characterizes the will to power, as it functions in human beings at least,³¹ as “a second-order desire for the ability to satisfy one’s other, or first-order, desires” (1990, p.211), Reginster describes it as “a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire” (2007, p.37), and Owen portrays it as “an architectonic interest in the feeling of power” (2007, p.34).³² Rather than focusing upon the potential differences between these viewpoints, it will be most useful for my argument here to bring out two points that virtually all interpretations of the will to power doctrine agree on.

The first is that ‘power’, in this context, is not any sort of political or social dominance. Nietzsche is not claiming that all actions are motivated by some sort of primitive desire for control over others, and it is not this sort of dominance that Nietzsche is imagining when he says “What is good—Everything that enhances people’s feeling of power, will to power, power itself”.

The second point of widespread agreement amongst interpreters of the will to power is closely related to the first. It can be brought out particularly clearly by considering the following question: if the will to power is not claiming that all human behaviour aims at achieving social or political power, what does it

³⁰Some excellent treatments will be mentioned below.

³¹I add this caveat because Clark distinguishes sharply between the will to power as a psychological hypothesis about human beings and will to power as a cosmological theory. Of the latter she says: “[Nietzsche’s] cosmological doctrine of the will to power is an attempt to read his values into the world and... he does not consider it to be true” (1990, p.221).

³²These certainly do not represent the only commentators who have written on the will to power, and worthwhile treatments can also be found in Danto (1980), Nehamas (1985), Poellner (1995) and Richardson (1996) amongst others.

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claim that we are aiming at instead? The answer to this question, put bluntly, is that the will to power doctrine does not posit any sort of specific universal goal of human behaviour at all. Rather, when Nietzsche says that we are all will to power, he does not think that we all aim at the same concrete goal, i.e. power. Instead, he is trying to make a point about the way in which we pursue all of our *particular* goals, whatever they may be. The exact nature of the point he is trying to make is the source of some controversy, but the general idea seems to be something like this: human beings (and indeed all of the organic world) seek to express their strength through the pursuit of their goals, ideally in such a way as to keep continually striving to overcome greater and greater obstacles and resistances.

Perhaps this is not the best way of expressing this key Nietzschean idea, and I would certainly not want to claim that it is either definitive or exhaustive as a definition. However, it certainly captures that which is most important for my present purposes: namely, that the will to power doctrine does not provide human beings with any specific goal at which to aim, but rather makes a claim about the way they do (and should) pursue particular concrete goals. Due to this, the recognition that the will to power motivates all human actions is completely compatible with the idea that each of us should live by a personalized ethics determined by the specifics of our own nature. The will to power may well, as Nietzsche often suggests, provide some sort of standard for judging how successfully we are pursuing our aims and goals, but it alone cannot directly provide an answer to which particular aims and goals we should actually pursue.

My previous statement may not be entirely correct. It might be argued that if we have both the will to power as a standard of evaluation, as well as the relevant facts about a given person's constitution, then we should theoretically be able to calculate which goals/aims etc. will enable the individual in question to most effectively maximize their flourishing (conceived in terms of power). In other words, there must be some one possible ethic which will, as a matter of fact, allow any given individual to most effectively become what they are.

I take this to be essentially correct. It does, however, leave a slightly misleading impression. For whilst there is, on this understanding, a single personalized

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ethic which will most effectively enhance the flourishing of any given individual, discovering it, or even having any idea of the extent to which you have discovered it or not, remains little more than a theoretical possibility. There are several reasons why this is so. Firstly, there are the extreme limits upon accurate self-knowledge. As Nietzsche tells us in *Daybreak*:

However far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of *drives* which constitute his being. He can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counterplay amongst one another, above all the laws of their *nutriment* remain wholly unknown to him.

(D 119)

Given this, it clear that Nietzsche does not think we can simply survey our nature, get a clear grasp of what it involves, and then create an ethic that will lead to our flourishing. Rather, any such attempt will meet with the immediate difficulty that we simply do not have anywhere near the degree of self-knowledge required. This problem can, of course, be remedied to some extent, by gaining whatever self-knowledge we can. As this passage strongly suggests though, the sort of complete self-knowledge that would be required for an individual to create *the* single ethic that would most effectively maximize their flourishing is at least practically impossible, and perhaps even conceptually impossible.

The difficulties associated with gaining adequate self-knowledge are not the only complications that affect any individual trying to create a personalized ethic. For, even if an individual had something like full self-knowledge, they would still not be in a position to create *the* ethic most suited to their own needs. This is because, on Nietzsche's account, aside from lacking the requisite degree of self-knowledge to create such an ethic, we also lack a sufficient degree of knowledge about the various physiological and psychological effects of living by different ethical precepts. All study of ethics so far in human history has, in Nietzsche's eyes, consisted in little more than idle speculation or elaborate justifications of existing ethical codes. The sort of serious, systematic and scientific (in the sense of *wissenschaftliche*) study of the different ethical options available to human beings required for this sort of enterprise simply does not exist, as Nietzsche makes clear in the following passage:

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In Europe these days, moral sentiment is just as refined, late, multiple, sensitive, and subtle as the “science of morals” (which belongs with it) is young, neophyte, clumsy, and crude:—an attractive contrast, and one that occasionally becomes visible, embodied in the person of the moralist himself. Considering what it signifies, the very phrase “science of morals” is much too arrogant and offends *good* taste, which always tends to prefer more modest terms. We should admit to ourselves with all due severity exactly *what* will be necessary for a long time to come and *what* is provisionally correct, namely: collecting material, formulating concepts, and putting in to order the tremendous realm of tender value feelings and value distinctions that live, grow, reproduce, and are destroyed,—all of which would be a preparation for a *typology* of morals.

(BGE 186)

As Nietzsche goes on to make clear in the remainder of this section, even this preliminary typological task has been neglected by all previous attempts at a “science of morals”. Everyone who has previously attempted to contribute to such a science, according to Nietzsche, has actually produced little more than a short-sighted attempt to prove the universal validity of the morality of their own particular time and place. Hence, no-one has ever even gone so far as collecting data on the various types of ethical outlook that have existed so far on earth, let alone grappling with the “genuine problems involved in morality, problems that only emerge from a comparison of many *different* moralities” (BGE 186). For this reason, the sort of knowledge that would be required for discovering *the* ethical code which would most effectively enhance an individual’s flourishing, i.e. a detailed knowledge of the specific physiological and psychological effects associated with adopting any of the bewildering variety of ethical options available to mankind, is simply not available.

Hence, the individual trying to create a personalized ethics is assailed by difficulties in both the areas where they need knowledge most: they can neither have adequate self-knowledge, nor adequate knowledge of the sort of consequences that are to be expected from adopting different ethical stances. Add to this the fact that the constitution of every individual is constantly shifting, and we can begin to see why Nietzsche so frequently paints the task facing his “*unknown friends*” (GM III: 27) as being arduous and uncertain. Yet, even though

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discovering *the* single ethic most suited to any given individual is little more than an abstract theoretical possibility, it does still provide a useful concept for understanding Nietzsche's position. This is because the search for a personalized ethics can be thought of as something akin to an ongoing attempt to reduce the distance between this ideal ethic and the ethic one actually lives by—where this is to be conceived so as to include one's deeply held ethical sentiments as well as one's more explicitly held ethical beliefs.

This may initially sound like a slightly odd claim. After all, given that a person can have so little knowledge of what their ideal ethic actually is, how can they possibly hope to approximate it? This is certainly a good question, and a knowledge of this difficulty is plausibly cast as contributing to Nietzsche's strong desire to give ethical thinking a more scientific basis, which I have already noted on a couple of occasions. Yet, in spite of the difficulties with ascertaining which ethical options are genuinely in our best interests, Nietzsche clearly does not conceive the whole project as being impossible. Rather, it is something we must engage in if we are to become who we are, in spite of its difficulties. In terms of practical advice for people setting out on this road, Nietzsche is clearly in a difficult position, as each person must carve their own unique path (as Zarathustra says to his disciples: "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you" (Z I: "Of the Bestowing Virtue", 3). Yet, in spite of the notorious lack of positive advice given by Nietzsche in this area, his position does have one very strong negative implication—that any individual consciously aiming to approximate to their ideal ethic must constantly subject their existing ethical beliefs and sentiments to critical scrutiny. The value of such an enterprise for an individual trying to gain autonomy is shown nicely by the following description of Schopenhauer's development that Nietzsche gives in *Schopenhauer as Educator*:

a struggle by such a great man *against* his age seems to be only a senseless and destructive attack on himself. But only seems so; for he is contending against those aspects of his age that prevent him from becoming great, which means, in his case, being entirely free and entirely himself. From which it follows that his hostility is at bottom directed against that which, though he finds it in himself, is not truly himself: against the indecent compounding and confusing of things eternally incompatible, against the soldering of time-bound things on to his own

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untimeliness. . . Thus Schopenhauer strove from his early youth against that false, idle and unworthy mother, his age, and by as it were expelling herself from him, he healed and purified his being and rediscovered himself in the health and purity native to him.

(UM III: 3)

This passage is not alone in suggesting that questioning one's existing attitudes and beliefs can be of benefit. In fact, a great portion of Nietzsche's later works is dedicated to trying to show people³³ the dubious nature of many of (what he takes to be) their existing moral beliefs and attitudes, and also the potentially harmful effect they have on them as unique individuals. In light of this, I think it is safe to say that this sort of critical reflection on one's existing ethic—taken very broadly, to include reflection on both one's consciously held attitudes and one's more deeply held affective reactions, on any question of what is of value, what rules or laws to follow, which virtues to cultivate etc.—is at least potentially³⁴ very useful for someone trying to attain to their ideal ethic.

There are some fairly straightforward Nietzschean reasons for this. Firstly, given that he takes his target audience (higher individuals, free spirits, great men, etc.) to have natures that are both rare and often fragile, it is highly unlikely that simply accepting the norms of their surroundings unquestioningly will provide them with an adequate ethic for achieving their "*highest potential power and splendour*" (GM P:6). This unlikeliness is increased heavily, in Nietzsche's eyes, by the fact that many of our existing moral beliefs have their roots in the feelings of impotency and powerlessness of the weak and mediocre, and as such are specifically suited to stifling the strong and the rare.

But it is not only the prejudices that a person takes from their surrounding that must be guarded against, on Nietzsche's account. "Everything unconditional belongs to pathology" (BGE 154) and our own self-created ethical beliefs/dispositions etc. are no exception. To uncritically cling to one's self-given laws (for example) long after the circumstances in which they arose have passed, and/or long after they cease to be of any obvious benefit, can be just as harmful

³³Or some people, at least.

³⁴I say potentially here because Nietzsche does leave room in his account for people to arrive unreflectively at a personalized ethic, as was discussed at the beginning of this section.

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as merely unquestioningly accepting the default ethical position of one's age. It is in the light of this sort of consideration, I take it, that Nietzsche issues the following warning to the "free spirits", concerning their one remaining virtue, genuine honesty (*Redlichkeit*):

Our genuine honesty, we free spirits,—let us make sure that it does not become our vanity, our pomp and finery, our limitation, our stupidity! Every virtue tends towards stupidity, every stupidity towards virtue... let us make sure we do not end up becoming saints or tedious bores out of genuine honesty!

(BGE 227)

Therefore, in spite of the fact that Nietzsche cannot tell his imagined higher individuals of the future specifically what they should each value, there is still some definite advice he can offer—namely, to be constantly on guard against those prejudices and stupidities of our own perspective which stop us from becoming who we are, whether these prejudices have been forced upon us by the "idle and unworthy mother" that is our society and age, or whether they represent a "condition for life" from an earlier stage of our development.

Personalized Ethics and Autonomy

In the previous section I gave an account of what the creation of a personalized ethic amounts to, on Nietzsche's view. To conclude, I will now look at the relationship that holds between personalized ethics of this form and autonomy.

At first glance, it might seem that there is an obvious argument linking autonomy and personalized ethics that runs roughly as follows: the ethic a person lives by (if they do genuinely so live) determines how they act. Therefore, given that autonomy means self-determination, it is obvious that living by an ethic that is *one's own* will result in a higher degree of autonomy than living by an ethic which one merely inherits or is born into.

This argument is not fundamentally flawed in any way, and does capture something of Nietzsche's position. Yet, it is still not adequate on its own. To understand why, it will be useful to expand upon a distinction I made at the very beginning of this chapter, that between an ethic being *personal* and an

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ethic being *personalized*. When I call an ethic personal, I mean roughly that it is reflectively endorsed by the agent. This need not mean that they have ever gone through any specific procedure intended to prove that they genuinely understand and believe that they should abide by the dictates of whatever ethic they endorse. Rather, it can simply be shown through their behaviour over time, the way they respond to certain types of questioning, and so on.³⁵ By calling an ethic personalized, by contrast, I mean something stronger. For an ethic to be personalized, it must meet the same condition as a personal ethic, but must also be such that it promotes specifically the flourishing (conceived in terms of will to power) of the person who holds it.

This last condition is obviously a little too vague as it stands, for at least two reasons. Firstly, it might be thought that, given the earlier argument to the effect that any ethic is better than no ethic in terms of autonomy, there might be some grounds for thinking that virtually every ethic promotes flourishing, and hence that any personal ethic is also, by extension, a personalized ethic. Secondly, saying it must promote *specifically* the flourishing of the individual in question might give the statement some strange implications. As an example, take the following: a person creates an ethic which enhances their flourishing to a high degree. But, by sheer coincidence, there is actually another person somewhere in the world who this ethic would enhance the flourishing of to an even greater extent. Now, it might seem that this ethic cannot be called personalized, even though it seems intuitively to fit the criteria.

There is a reason for this vagueness though, and it lies in the fact that Nietzsche takes autonomy to be something which is a matter of degree, rather than something one either possesses or does not possess. Due to this, it is not possible to state any exact degree of flourishing or power that must be achieved in order for autonomy to be guaranteed, or to state in any specific way how much greater an effect on one's flourishing an ethic must have to move from being merely personal to being personalized. If any concrete statement can be made here, it is something along the lines of 'more power/flourishing equals more autonomy'. Also, in terms of differentiating between an ethic that is merely

³⁵This definition is intended to be very general, and I have left it open how much (and to a certain extent, if at all) it needs to differ in content from the ethic of one's surroundings.

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personal and one that is personalized, the difference is one of degrees along this scale, and might be thought of like this: a personalized ethic is one which is self-given and has a high degree of fit with the individual's flourishing, whereas an ethic that is merely personal is one which is self-given but where the degree of fit with the individual's specific character is left as an open question.³⁶

With this distinction between personal and personalized ethics in place, it is now possible to see the inadequacies in the straightforward argument given earlier for linking autonomy and personalized ethics. According to that argument, to recap, a person's actions are caused by the ethic they live by.³⁷ Hence, given that autonomy means self-determination, living by an ethic that is one's own will result in a higher degree of autonomy than living by an ethic which is somehow received or inherited. Now, the reason why this argument is not wholly adequate is that it only shows why an ethic that is personal results in a higher degree of autonomy than an ethic which is taken unquestioningly from one's surroundings. Nietzsche's claim, however, is stronger than this. To achieve the highest degrees of autonomy, according to the reading I am proposing, it is not enough that the ethic one lives by be personal in this weak sense. Instead, it must meet the stronger requirement of being personalized. What is the reason for this? Why does an ethic that enhances a person's power necessarily result in more autonomy?

There is clearly more than one way this question could be answered. One possible option might be to try and give another relatively straightforward argument, based on the idea of autonomy as self-determination. The thought here might go something like this: when an ethic is merely personal, it is only *one's own* in one sense—i.e. in the sense of being genuinely endorsed by the person who lives by it. When an ethic is personalized, on the other hand, it is one's own in two distinct senses. Firstly, because it is a species of personal ethic, it is one's own in the sense of being genuinely endorsed. On top of this though, it is also one's own in a second sense, in that it somehow follows from, is specific to, or perhaps shows a high degree of fit with, one's own natural constitution as

³⁶Hence, an ethic can be both personal *and* personalized: personalized ethics make up a subsection of the larger category of personal ethics.

³⁷Once again, assuming that they do so live.

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an individual. From here, the rest of the argument is simple: given that autonomy means self-determination, and given that a person's ethic determines their actions, it follows that an ethic which is one's own in both senses will give a higher degree of autonomy than an ethic which is only one's own in the first of the two senses.

Whatever the merits of this sort of argument, I will not examine it too closely here as it doesn't obviously reflect any line of reasoning that is found in Nietzsche's works. To understand the particularly Nietzschean reasons for seeing a personalized ethics as being linked with the highest degrees of autonomy, it will be helpful to look at another aspect of Nietzsche's ideas: his belief in what might be called the relativity of autonomy.

The following remark from *Beyond Good and Evil* represents a famous statement that I take to express Nietzsche's belief in the relativity of autonomy:

“un-free will” is mythology: in real life it is only a matter of *strong* and *weak* wills.

(BGE 21)

This remark comes from BGE 21, a passage containing perhaps Nietzsche's most famous denial of free will, and one that I have had reason to quote from before.³⁸ Nietzsche's main aim in this passage is to deny the coherence of the notions of both free will (“in the superlative metaphysical sense”) and its opposite un-free will. Belief in either of these self-contradictory fictions is, according to the argument of this passage, simply a sign of some sort of psychological weakness on the part of its adherent (arrogance and vanity in the case of the belief in free will, a cowardly desire to shift the blame for their actions onto other sources, in the case of belief in un-free will). It is in this context where Nietzsche claims that to think in terms of free and un-free will is to think “*mythologically*”, and that “in real life it is only a matter of *strong* and *weak* wills”.

It is this proposed shift from talk of “free” and “un-free” wills to talk of “*strong*” and “*weak*” wills that is important here, as this shift mirrors the move

³⁸During my discussion of the sovereign individual as a counter-ideal on page 18, for example, and also on page 59.

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from what might be called an 'absolute' conception of autonomy to the sort of 'relative' conception that I am attributing to Nietzsche. To understand autonomy (or freedom) after the fashion of the absolute conception is to see it as being something along the lines of a distinct property or capacity that human beings could possess (or not possess) in complete abstraction from their circumstances and relations to others. From within this perspective it should be possible to imagine two human beings, similar in almost every respect, except that one is free whilst the other is not (possibly due to the fact that the first possesses a faculty of free will, whilst the other does not)—just as it should be possible to imagine two such people who differ only in that the first has the capacity of sight, whilst the other does not.

This absolute conception underlies both the belief in free will “in the superlative metaphysical sense” and in its opposite, the absolutely un-free will, as once such an all-or-nothing understanding of freedom has been accepted, the only two plausible positions available seem to be all (i.e. absolute freedom of the will in a metaphysical sense for every human being) or nothing (absolute un-freedom of all human actions through determinism). Hence, when Nietzsche rejects both free will and un-free will as errors, it is at least partly due to the fact that both rely on this absolute conception which treats human actions using the binary pairing of free and unfree.

The alternative I take Nietzsche to be proposing to this absolute conception, as has already been mentioned, is the relative conception. This second view essentially claims the opposite of the absolute conception: that autonomy consists entirely in the nature of one's relations to other things/people, and cannot coherently be conceived as a property belonging to (or not belonging to) the will of an isolated individual. According to this view of autonomy, the thought experiment that was proposed in connection with the absolute conception is incoherent: if we imagine two people who are exactly the same in all respects except that of their autonomy, then we have also necessarily imagined two people with the same amount of autonomy. On this alternative picture, autonomy is not a non-relational property that could be possessed (or not possessed, as the case may be) by an abstract individual, but is rather consequent upon the relation of the individual to their circumstances and to other people.

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To be autonomous is for one's will to be dominant (or perhaps active) in relation to these external forces, and to lack autonomy is simply the converse, i.e. for one's will to be subjugated by (or be reactive in relation to) other wills and forces.

With this picture in place, we can now see why Nietzsche thinks that the important distinction is not that between free and un-free wills, but is rather that between strong and weak wills. Nobody, according to Nietzsche's understanding, is either absolutely free or absolutely un-free in the senses required by the classic free will/determinism debate. Rather, everybody stands somewhere along a sliding scale of autonomy, depending upon the strength or weakness of their will in relation to other wills,³⁹ and the degree to which they are active (rather than reactive) in relation to other forces.

It is this understanding of autonomy that underlies Nietzsche's view that a personalized ethic leads to a greater degree of autonomy than an ethic that is merely personal. The reason for this is simple: a personalized ethic is, according to the definition that I have given, a type of personal ethic (in the sense of being somehow created or endorsed by the agent) that is distinguished by the high degree of fit it has with the nature of the agent who holds it, and which therefore results in a high degree of power. Yet, as we have just seen, an ethic that results in a high degree of power for its holder is, necessarily for Nietzsche, an ethic that yields a high degree of autonomy. This is because in giving greater power to the agent in question, it thereby improves the position of their will in relation to that of others, as well as their ability to extend their will over long stretches of time.

As things stand, this account is very abstract and could easily lead to misunderstandings. When couched in these terms, it can sound as if the relationship between a personalized ethic and autonomy is a purely formal one between two philosophical ideas, with little relevance to the lived life of an ethical agent. As a matter of fact though, Nietzsche's message is far more concrete than this—being autonomous means living a life directed by goals and values that enable you to

³⁹It is worth noting here that at least all organic matter, if not more, is will for Nietzsche, hence this statement is not meant to imply that one's autonomy is determined entirely by relations to other people.

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flourish as a person, and being strong enough to not be held back by others in the pursuit of such a life.

This may sound like the sort of egoistic viewpoint that even someone like Callicles could get behind, and this sort of accusation is not entirely misguided. After all, a large part of Nietzsche's project is to get a certain part of humanity, the supposedly higher individuals, to abandon the altruistic principles of Judaeo-Christian morality so that they can achieve their "*highest potential power and splendour*" (GM P: 6). This does not tell the full story though. Whilst Nietzsche emphasizes the necessity of strength for those who want to achieve power and autonomy, his reasons for doing so often differ greatly from the sort of reasons we might expect from a Calliclean egoist. Strength is not required merely in order to cut down one's competitors and overpower those who are weaker. Rather, strength is required for more subtle reasons: to resist the seeming authority of traditional valuations, to avoid slipping into the comfortable, cow-like existence of the 'herd', and even to avoid letting the distress of others become one's own downfall. This final point is made forcefully in the following passage:

How is it possible to keep to *one's own* path! Some clamour is constantly calling us aside; rarely does our eye see something there that does not make it necessary to drop our own occupation instantly and spring to assistance. I know, there are a hundred decent and praiseworthy ways of losing myself *from my path*, and, verily, highly "moral" ways! Yes, the moral teacher of compassion even goes so far as to hold that precisely this and only this is moral—to lose *one's own* way like this in order to help a neighbour. . . Yes, there is a secret seduction even in all these things which arouse compassion and cry out for help, for our own way is hard and demanding and so far from love and gratitude of others that we are by no means reluctant to escape from it, from it and our ownmost conscience—and take refuge in the conscience of the others and in the lovely temple of the "religion of compassion".

(GS 338)

Nietzsche's claim that autonomy requires the strength to have one's will in a dominant relation to that of others is therefore not solely, and arguably even not primarily, meant to imply that autonomy involves dominating and suppressing

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the will of others in the sense in which we would ordinarily mean a phrase such as this. Rather, strength is required at least partly, if not largely, so that the needs and beliefs of others do not become 'seductions' which allow higher individuals to guiltlessly slip off one of the side roads along their own difficult and often thankless path.⁴⁰

There are many other points that could be made along these lines. For one thing, Nietzsche sometimes points out that altruism is useless unless it is built on a solid foundation of egoism: the help you offer to others may be worthless if you have not first helped yourself. Similarly, Nietzsche's belief that the achievement of power (and hence greater degrees of autonomy) requires overcoming greater and greater obstacles can be seen as implying that one should actively will the strengthening of one's opponents. Finally, there are also many familiar points about Nietzsche's interests lying in the sort of 'spiritual' dominance involved both in the creation of great works of art and philosophy, as well as in the overcoming of the baser aspects of one's self, rather than in external dominance over others. However far one wants to go in these efforts to distance Nietzsche's stance from that of someone like Callicles, the fundamental point remains the same: power and autonomy go hand in hand, and to achieve them a person must live according to an ethic that enables them to become specifically who they are.

⁴⁰Hence we find Zarathustra saying: "In sparing and pitying my greatest danger always lay; and all human nature wants to be spared and pitied" (Z III: "The Homecoming". cf. also Z IV: "The Cry of Distress", where pity is described as Zarathustra's "last sin").

CHAPTER IV

CONSCIOUSNESS

Over the course of the previous chapters a certain picture has started to emerge. For Nietzsche, the degree of autonomy a person possesses is determined by the power¹ of their will in relation to other wills. Put extremely briefly, the formula which sums up the relationship between the two aspects of this equation is basically more power equals more autonomy. In order to achieve the highest degrees of autonomy possible, I have argued, one must impose (whether intentionally or not) what I have called an ethic upon one's self and one's actions. This ethic, if it is to result in the highest degrees of both power and autonomy possible, must have several key features: it must be self-given rather than simply inherited from one's surroundings or accepted on authority, it must act to unify the various drives and affects of the person who holds it, and it must match up to the specific "conditions of life" (A11)² of the individual in question in such a way that it enables them to attain their "*highest potential power and splendor*" (GM P: 6) and become who they are.

Some questions still remain with respect to this picture though, and in this chapter I will be addressing an issue which has cropped up several times already: namely, how this account coheres with Nietzsche's views on consciousness. In general, it is fair to say that Nietzsche offers what might be called a deflationary account of consciousness, as he frequently questions both the efficacy of con-

¹Other words, such as strength, dominance or activity, might also be appropriate here.

²This is not an exact quote, but is rather a paraphrase from Nietzsche's statement that "Whatever is not a condition for life *harms* it".

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conscious thought in relation to our actions and avowed evaluations, as well as the value of the sort of heightened level of conscious thought present in modern European society. Yet, in the account I have given so far, I have still tried leave room in Nietzsche's viewpoint for conscious reflection and decision (especially with regard to the ethic a person adopts) to play a possible role. My main aim in this chapter will therefore be to justify the role I have preserved for conscious thought, and to show that it is compatible with Nietzsche's deflationary account of consciousness.

In order to reach this goal, I will take the two types of consideration mentioned above in turn. To begin with, I will look at those aspects of Nietzsche's works which question the efficacy of conscious thought. As with many aspects of Nietzsche's thought, the relevant passages on this issue admit of more than one interpretation, so my first task will be to sketch out some of the different ways in which they might be understood. For the purposes of my discussion, I will distinguish between what I shall call 'strong' and 'moderate' interpretations of the passages in question. According to those interpretations that I shall label strong, consciousness plays no significant role in determining our actions: the true determinants of action lie far below the level of consciousness, and our conscious thoughts are at most links in the causal chain between these determining factors and the actions that they produce. The interpretations which I shall call moderate, on the other hand, maintain that the conscious part of our minds is, for Nietzsche, merely the smallest and least significant aspect of our mental activity, and that its importance in determining what we think and how we act is negligible when compared with the work done by non-conscious factors. In relation to the strong interpretations, I will argue that they cannot be made to fit with Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism. With regard to the moderate interpretations, I will agree that they present an essentially correct account of Nietzsche's views, but argue that they do not conflict with the possibility of *some* role being left for conscious thought in Nietzsche's positive project.

After this, I will then turn to the considerations relating to the value of consciousness. Here, I will look at Nietzsche's claims that consciousness is a negative phenomenon arising from "the community- and herd-aspects" (GS 354) of mankind's nature, as well as his claim that modern Europeans suffer

from an excess of consciousness. In both cases, I will not question the validity of attributing these views to Nietzsche. However, I will argue that, according to the account Nietzsche gives, nothing about the origin or present state of consciousness can determine entirely what its value for future higher individuals might be, and that whatever value it might come to have will be determined entirely by the new uses to which it can be put. Therefore neither of these considerations about the value of consciousness rule out the possibility that some of those individuals who achieve a high degree of autonomy in the future will make use of conscious reflection and decision-making on their way to attaining it. I will then conclude with some remarks about the exact role that is left for consciousness to play in Nietzsche's account of autonomy.

Nietzsche's Use of the Word 'Consciousness'

Before beginning this chapter it will be worth making a few remarks about the particular way in which Nietzsche uses the term 'consciousness' (*Bewusstsein*³) and its cognates throughout his works. This is made necessary by the fact that Nietzsche uses the term somewhat inconsistently and, at certain times at least, slightly unconventionally.

In broad outline, Nietzsche uses the word consciousness in two distinct (although obviously related) ways. Sometimes, he uses the term consciousness to signify simply the capacity for a perceptual and intellectual awareness of both the world and one's own self. This use of the word consciousness, I take it, is in line with the standard use of the term, and is fairly easy to recognize. According to this use of the term, human beings are not the only animals who possess consciousness,⁴ and conscious states can include perceptual sensations, feelings and emotions, as well as (in human beings at least) abstract and discursive thoughts.

In some passages, however, Nietzsche seems to mean something significantly narrower by term consciousness. In this mood, Nietzsche often contrasts con-

³Whilst *Bewusstsein* is the term Nietzsche almost always uses, there is at least one passage (GS 11) where he uses both *Bewusstsein* and the slightly more unconventional *Bewusstheit*. This point was brought to my attention by Bernard Williams' editorial notes to *The Gay Science*.

⁴Although obviously the human form of consciousness will be seen as more complex or advanced.

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sciousness to instinct, and associates it predominantly with the rational and reflective element in human beings, as in the following quote from the *Genealogy* (which we will have cause to return to later):

They [the men who were first “enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace”] felt they were clumsy at performing the simplest task, they did not have their familiar guide any more for this new, unknown world, those regulating impulses that unconsciously led them to safety—the poor things were reduced to relying on thinking, inference, calculation, and the connecting of cause with effect, that is, to relying on their “consciousness”, that most impoverished and error-prone organ!

(GM II: 16)

This passage provides a particularly good example of Nietzsche's narrower use of the word consciousness. For one thing, Nietzsche simply cannot be using the term consciousness in the broad sense outlined above without involving himself in some very strange claims. If he was using the term in the more conventional sense, the import of this passage from the *Genealogy* would have to be something like the following: during their “unrestrained and shapeless” (GM II: 17) existence in prehistoric times, human beings⁵ lived much like automatons, reacting to external stimuli but without any actual awareness of themselves and the world around them. Then, due to the arrival of “a conqueror and master race” that is “organized on a war footing, and with the power to organize” (GM II: 17) this nomadic populace suddenly finds itself under the power of a state with various laws and traditions, along with the power to punish those who disobey these laws. As a reaction to this “leap” (GM II: 17) into new circumstances, these early human beings stop merely reacting like automatons, and begin to have a conscious awareness of the world around them.

This is clearly not the point that Nietzsche was trying to make. What changed about these early human beings was not that they went from being unaware of the world around them to possessing a conscious awareness of it. Rather, what changed is that they stopped acting solely according to instinct,

⁵Or at least some human beings.

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i.e. without thinking about their actions before doing them, and began to depend on things such as: “thinking, inference, calculation and the connecting of cause with effect”. Hence, in some instances of Nietzsche’s use of the word consciousness it does not mean merely awareness, but something more along the lines of *reflective* awareness. Or, put another way, sometimes Nietzsche uses the word consciousness to denote something like our ability to act on the basis of judgements and reasoning.⁶

Earlier on in this section I accused Nietzsche of using the term consciousness in a slightly unconventional sense. This might be slightly unfair, as there is a sense in which we might ordinarily use the word ‘conscious’ which is roughly equivalent to this. Imagine, for instance, a person walking through the park lost in their own thoughts, who then suddenly becomes the target of a fast-flying ball. Then, at the last second, they instinctively (as we might say) throw their arms up in front of their head and block the ball. Now, when talking about this, it might be perfectly natural for the person to say things such as “I didn’t consciously put up my hands” or “It wasn’t a conscious decision to block that ball”. These sorts of remarks, however, are clearly not intended to mean that the person’s conscious awareness played no part in the procedure, as if they had continued to think that they were walking along the path for several moments after the incident, or even that they had been having no experiences whatsoever. Rather, they are intended to convey the fact that the action was a reflex—an action which involved no prior thought or reasoning on the part of the person performing it.

There may be some ground, therefore, for thinking that neither of the two senses of the word consciousness that Nietzsche employs can fairly be called unconventional. The fact remains though that Nietzsche does use this term in two different senses, and gives little or no explicit indication of which sense he is using it in any given passage. At certain points this doesn’t really matter, as the narrower sense of consciousness is contained in the broader one. At other times though it can cause confusions or make Nietzsche’s arguments appear strange. For this reason, I will use certain strategic points in this chapter to indicate which sense of the term consciousness is under discussion.

⁶A similar point is made and explored in detail by Katsafanas (2005).

The Efficacy of Consciousness

To begin this chapter, I will look at those aspects of Nietzsche's deflationary account of consciousness that touch specifically on the efficacy of our conscious thought in relation to our actions and evaluations. As was mentioned in the introduction, these aspects of Nietzsche's thought can be read in different ways. For the sake of brevity, I will treat these different readings in the next two subsections respectively under the broad categories of 'strong' and 'moderate'.

Strong Readings: Consciousness as Completely Ineffective

The main claim of the readings that I am labelling 'strong' is that Nietzsche believes that our conscious mental activity plays no significant role whatsoever in determining either our actions or our beliefs.⁷ The classic statement of this view is to be found in Leiter's book *Nietzsche on Morality*, so it is from here that I will mainly draw in this section.

According to Leiter, Nietzsche holds an epiphenomenalist position. Or rather, to be more precise, Leiter actually thinks that Nietzsche switches between two slightly different epiphenomenalist positions. However, before going into any sort of description of what either of these two different positions involve, it will be useful to introduce some of Leiter's terminology, namely his idea of "type-facts" (Leiter, 2002, p.91). The notion of type-facts plays a crucial role in the way Leiter puts forward his description of Nietzsche's purported epiphenomenalism, so I will begin by quoting Leiter's account of exactly what type-facts are:

each person has a fixed psycho-physical constitution, which defines him as a particular *type* of person. Call the relevant psycho-physical facts here "type-facts". Type-facts, for Nietzsche, are either *psychological* facts about the person, or facts about the person's unconscious drives or affects. The claim, then, is that each person has certain largely immutable physiological and psychic traits, that constitute the "type" of person he or she is.

(Leiter, 2002, p.91)

⁷This statement may sound a little strange, as our beliefs are (at least usually) consciously held. The meaning of this statement will, however, become clearer later on.

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The general claim then, which even when taken by itself is not uncontroversial, is that Nietzsche believes that every single person possesses an unchanging “psycho-physical” nature which marks them out as a certain type of individual—as a master or a slave perhaps, or as one of the weak or one of the strong. With this idea in place, we can now move on to looking at what Nietzsche’s supposed epiphenomenalism involves. Yet, as was mentioned above, Leiter actually thinks that Nietzsche endorses two different forms of epiphenomenalism at different times: what he calls kind-epiphenomenalism and token-epiphenomenalism.

Of these two positions, it is kind-epiphenomenalism⁸ that Leiter takes to be Nietzsche’s more considered view. According to this view:

conscious states are only causally effective in virtue of type-facts about the person (that is, not simply in virtue of their being conscious states). Put more simply: consciousness is not causally effective in its own right. While a person’s conscious states may be part of the causal chain leading up to action, they play that role only in virtue of type-facts about the person.

(Leiter, 2002, p.91-2)

This view, then, holds that our conscious states play no significant *determining* role in our lives. What our actions will be, along with everything we believe, is determined long before any of this reaches consciousness by the interplay between the relevant type-facts about ourselves and facts about our environment. Consciousness may be part of the causal chain that leads from type-facts (along with environmental factors) to actions and beliefs, but all of the truly important work is done long before any form of consciousness is involved. Or, as Leiter puts this, type-facts are both “*causally primary*” and “*explanatorily primary*” (Leiter, 2002, p.91) with respect to the lives of human beings.

Alongside kind-epiphenomenalism there is also token-epiphenomenalism. This is, on Leiter’s reading, a “more radical (and less plausible) view” which Nietzsche “[a]t times. . . seems to embrace” (Leiter, 2002, p.92). Like kind-epiphenomenalism, token-epiphenomenalism shares the core view that “consciousness

⁸As Leiter points out, this position would more naturally be called type-epiphenomenalism. Leiter chooses the term kind-epiphenomenalism to avoid any confusion with the notion of type-facts.

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is not causally effective in its own right". The difference, however, lies in the nature of the relationship that is held to maintain between type-facts, environmental factors, consciousness and action. According to kind-epiphenomenalism, everything is determined by the interaction of type-facts and environmental factors. These then give rise to conscious experience, which in their turn cause actions. Token-epiphenomenalism, on the other hand, paints a more radical picture. As with kind-epiphenomenalism, the crucial work is again done by the combination of type-facts with environmental factors. On this view though: "conscious states are simply *effects* of underlying type-facts about the person, and play no causal role whatsoever" (Leiter, 2002, p.92). In other words, token-epiphenomenalism paints the relationship between type-facts, environmental factors, consciousness and action in the following way: the determination of what a person will do once again occurs through the interplay of type-facts and environmental factors. The combination of these two things then independently causes *both* our actions *and* our conscious mental states. Our conscious thoughts, therefore, do not even act as a link in the causal chain between type-facts and actions on this view. Rather, our thoughts and our actions are merely two correlated phenomenon, which happen to match up to each other fairly well solely because they both spring from the same original causes.

Overall though, the differences between these two views are fairly slight. At base, they both revolve around the claim that "the real story of the genesis of an action begins with type-facts, which explain both consciousness *and* a person's actions" (Leiter, 2002, p.92), or, in other words, that we must give both causal and explanatory primacy to non-conscious factors in the explanation of human behaviour. For this reason, I will proceed in this section as if I am addressing both views at once, and will flag up any points where their differences become philosophically relevant.

Before examining to what extent, if at all, either of these views conflicts with the role I have tried to preserve for consciousness in Nietzsche's account of autonomy, it will be worthwhile to examine the evidence that Leiter gives for the presence of such views in Nietzsche's texts. The majority of the passages Leiter quotes, as far as I can see, actually do not support attributing an epiphenomenalist view to Nietzsche at all. He talks about, for example, "the theme of

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the ‘ridiculous overestimation and misunderstanding of consciousness’ (GS 11)” (Leiter, 2002, p.93) being a recurring one in Nietzsche’s works. This statement is, however, extremely vague about the nature of the overestimation and misunderstanding in question. Moreover, in the very same passage (GS 11) Nietzsche expresses concern about the fact that “[c]onsciousness gives rise to countless mistakes that lead an animal to perish sooner than necessary”—a very strange statement for a thinker supposedly committed to the explanatory primacy of non-conscious factors, or at least a very strange one for such a thinker to see as worth mentioning in an explanation.

Several of the other passages Leiter quotes as support fare no better. For example, the following passage from *Daybreak*:

we are accustomed to exclude all [the] unconscious processes from the accounting and to reflect on the preparation for an act only to the extent that it is conscious

(D 129)

While this statement certainly signals Nietzsche’s disapproval of giving explanatory primacy to consciousness alone, it is still quite a leap from this to the claim that explanatory primacy should be given entirely to non-conscious factors—a leap which is certainly not warranted by this statement, and which ignores all the various positions one could maintain between these two extremes.

Further examples could still be given. Take, for instance, Nietzsche’s statement (quoted by Leiter) that “by far the greatest part of our mind’s activity proceeds unconscious and unfelt” (GS 333). Once again, this statement can easily be seen as ruling out giving either causal or explanatory primacy to consciousness alone, but, importantly, does not go so far in the opposite direction as to demonstrate that Nietzsche believes either causal or (more significantly) explanatory primacy is possessed *solely* by unconscious factors. And, in any case, the scope of this statement is clearly limited by the phrase “by far the greatest part of”. Moreover, immediately after giving this quote, Leiter directs his readers (without quoting any particular part directly) to GS 354, a passage we will have cause to return to at length later on in this chapter. A large part of the focus of this passage from *The Gay Science* though, is Nietzsche’s attempt to

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show that consciousness is one of the “herd-aspects” of man’s nature, and hence only deals in “generalities” and that which is “non-individual” and “average”. For the “superficialization” that results from our consciousness to be of any real concern to Nietzsche though, it must be the case that he thinks that the nature of our conscious thoughts must play some sort of explanatory role, even if this is not as large a role as is usually assumed.

Perhaps more luck can be expected from what Leiter describes as Nietzsche’s “strongest argument for the epiphenomenality of the mental” (Leiter, 2002, p.93), namely his claim in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants, and not when ‘I’ want” (BGE 17). This, however, will also not take us as far as full-blown epiphenomenalism. As with some of the previous quotes, this argument can certainly be seen as implying that Nietzsche is committed to the causal primacy of non-conscious factors in relation to our conscious thoughts. Given that the thought from Nietzsche’s example is, *ex hypothesi*, not caused by a prior conscious mental event, it must either be self-caused or caused by a prior non-mental event of some sort. And, given that Nietzsche believes that the “*causa sui* is the best self-contradiction that has ever been conceived” (BGE 21), it is clear that he can only see one of these options can be plausible. Once again though, it seems to have very few direct implications with regard to the issue of the explanatory primacy of our conscious thought processes in relation to our actions and beliefs. This can even be seen from Leiter’s analysis, in which he describes it as a “phenomenological argument against the *causal autonomy* of consciousness”.⁹

Many of these objections might at first sound overly pedantic—particularly those that rely heavily on the distinction between causal and explanatory primacy. This distinction is, however, actually crucial for understanding the plausibility of attributing epiphenomenalism to Nietzsche. The reason for this is because, whilst Nietzsche must endorse both the causal and the explanatory primacy of non-conscious factors in order to be a fully-fledged epiphenomenalist, the explanatory primacy condition is actually much more important than it first appears. If belief in the causal primacy of non-conscious factors in relation to consciousness was enough to make a thinker into an epiphenomenalist, then

⁹The emphasis here is Leiter’s.

just about everyone except the most ardent traditional free will theorist would qualify for acceptance into the epiphenomenalist ranks. Everybody who accepted that human actions were events in the natural world and therefore must have causal antecedents would have to be included. Hence, if the view is to be given any bite, it must be combined with the explanatory primacy condition, i.e. the view that the ‘true’ or ‘correct’ explanation of any human behaviour is always one given in terms of non-conscious factors.¹⁰ Any quote taken from Nietzsche must, therefore, not merely demonstrate that he believes consciousness to not be causally autonomous, it must also show that he takes non-conscious factors to be *explanatorily* primary.

Of the passages that Leiter cites which do seem to offer support for attributing some sort of epiphenomenalist position to Nietzsche, all three seem to point far more naturally to the “more radical (and less plausible)” view of token-epiphenomenalism. Neither of the two passages which offer the most unequivocal support come from the published works, but rather both come from *The Will to Power*. Of these two, only one puts forward the view unconditionally: “everything of which we become conscious is a terminal phenomenon, an end—and causes nothing” (WP 478). The other merely toys with the possibility of such a view: “why could ‘a purpose’ not be an epiphenomenon in the series of changes in the activating forces that bring about the purposive action—a pale image sketched in consciousness beforehand that serves to orient us concerning events, even as a symptom of events, *not* as their cause?” (WP 666). Therefore, on the basis of these two passages, the safest conclusion would seem to be that (token-)epiphenomenalism was a view that Nietzsche seriously considered during the course of his note-taking, but did not see fit to incorporate into his published works.

¹⁰This is not how Leiter glosses the explanatory primacy condition. According to Leiter, to believe in the explanatory primacy of type-facts means to believe that “all other facts about a person (e.g., his beliefs, his actions, his life-trajectory) are explicable by type-facts about the person (perhaps in conjunction with other natural facts about the circumstances or environment)” (Leiter, 2002, p.91). This, however, seems much too weak. If all that is required is that one accepts that conscious states “are explicable” (in the sense of ‘can be explained by’) non-conscious factors, without any commitment to which type of explanation is superior, then what we have here would be more appropriately be called the explanatory equivalence condition. And, once again, this would clearly cast the net of epiphenomenalism so wide as to include many people who take themselves to be endorsing no such view.

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There is, however, one passage from the published works which Leiter quotes which does seem to suggest that Nietzsche is a token-epiphenomenalist. This passage comes from *Twilight of the Idols* and runs as follows:

The “inner world” is full of illusions and phantasms: will is one of them. The will does not do anything any more, and so it does not explain anything any more either—it just accompanies processes, but it can be absent as well. The so-called “motive”: another error. Just a surface phenomenon of consciousness, an “after-the-fact” that hides the *antecedentia* of an act more than it reveals them. Not to mention the I! That has become a fairy tale, a fiction, a play on words: it has stopped thinking, feeling, and willing altogether! . . . What follows from this? There are no mental causes whatsoever!

(TI: “The Four Great Errors”, 3)

This certainly contains some epiphenomenalist-sounding claims. The idea that the will “just accompanies processes” and can just as easily “be absent”, and particularly the striking claim that “[t]here are no mental causes whatsoever”, both seem to suggest epiphenomenalism. Moreover, his emphasis on the fact that the will “does not explain anything any more”, along with his claim that the motive usually “hides” the real antecedents of an act, means that this passage touches on issues relating to both the causal and the explanatory primacy of non-conscious factors. Therefore, of all the passages that Leiter cites, it seems fair to say that this one passage from *The Twilight of the Idols* is the only one that gives any concrete support to the claim that Nietzsche endorsed epiphenomenalism in his mature works.

The plausibility of attributing epiphenomenalism to Nietzsche obviously cannot be definitively decided on the basis of the evidence Leiter gives alone, however, so I will now look at the more philosophical issues relating to this claim. Now, as has been mentioned already, if Nietzsche is to be an epiphenomenalist, then he must endorse both the causal primacy condition, *and* the explanatory primacy condition. In relation to the causal primacy condition, which holds that conscious states must be caused by prior non-conscious states, it seems highly plausible that Nietzsche would endorse such a claim. His famous claim in BGE 21 that the “*causa sui* is the best self-contradiction that has

ever been conceived”, along with several others,¹¹ could be enlisted in support of this.

The explanatory primacy condition, on the other hand, is more problematic. As I argued earlier, if it is truly explanatory *primacy* that is meant here, this means that Nietzsche must believe that explanations in terms of non-conscious factors are significantly superior to explanations given in terms of conscious states. This is a view that it seems very difficult to attribute to Nietzsche. For one thing, it seems to possibly go against the importance he attributes to psychology. This is demonstrated well by Nietzsche’s desire that:

psychology again be recognized as queen of the sciences [*Wissenschaften*], and that the rest of the sciences exist to serve and prepare for it. Because, from now on, psychology is again the path to the fundamental problems.

(BGE 23)

Further evidence for this can also be seen in the nature of Nietzsche’s analysis in the *Genealogy*. There, he does not simply, or even primarily, rely upon non-conscious factors in his explanation of the origin and development of modern European morality, but shows an active interest in the psychology of the participants—in the sort of self-understandings and core beliefs of characters such as the slave, the noble and the priest (and others), and how these self-understandings and core beliefs enable them to deal with their situations and to exert a certain power over others.

It might be thought that this objection is not decisive. Perhaps it could be argued that the sort of psychology Nietzsche is in favour of involves exclusively, or at least primarily, explaining conscious beliefs and motives in terms of non-conscious factors about the person in question as well as facts about their environment. This might then be seen as compatible with his endorsing something like the explanatory primacy condition. There is, however, another even more serious reason why Nietzsche cannot endorse this condition: namely, his doctrine of perspectivism.

¹¹D 109, where Nietzsche’s remarks imply that the intellect is always the “blind instrument” of some (presumably unconscious) drive, is one good example. GS 333, where he speculates that every thought that rises to consciousness is “only the ultimate reconciliation scenes and final accounts” of a battle between unconscious drives, is another.

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Here is not the place to go into great detail about Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism. In his most famous statement of this position though (GM III: 12), one of the things Nietzsche stresses on more than one occasion is the importance of having a variety of perspectives on any given topic. As Nietzsche says there, "we can use the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations for knowledge", and "the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity' ". This seems to directly contradict the very notion of explanatory primacy *per se*, irrespective of whether it is used in regard to the explanation of conscious states or of any other given phenomenon.

This issue clearly needs to be treated carefully. As Leiter himself points out in his excellent essay "Perspectivism in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*", Nietzsche's perspectivism certainly does not entail that every perspective is as good as any other. The fact that there are only ever interpretations does not mean that every interpretation is equally valid. Hence, it is perfectly possible within the terms of perspectivism for one type of perspective to be superior to another. A naturalistic perspective, for example, can plausibly be argued to be considered superior by Nietzsche than say, the Christian religious perspective, just as one visual perspective can be said to give us a better knowledge of an object than another. However, whilst there is no reason why perspectivism should commit Nietzsche to any sort of all-encompassing relativism about knowledge, his particular version of perspectivism does seem to be very much wedded to the claim that there are always a variety of perspectives that can be taken on any issue, and that any sort of extreme focus on one type of perspective will always be harmful to true knowledge and "objectivity".¹² Hence, the idea that explanations given in terms of non-conscious factors should always be primary, if the notion of primacy is given any real force, will always be problematic when attributed to Nietzsche.

This fact can be seen clearly from Nietzsche's own work. To take the *Genealogy* as an example again, there we see Nietzsche using a variety of different perspectives in tracing some of the different threads in the development of Judaeo-Christian morality. Throughout this treatise, Nietzsche uses (at the

¹²This aspect of Nietzsche's perspectivism is brought out very well in Schacht (1996).

very least) philosophical, psychological, physiological, sociological, aesthetic, and philological considerations in making his point. There is no suggestion anywhere that any of these types of consideration are more basic or important than the others, or that all of these different types of consideration would, in an ideal world, be reduced to one single type of explanation. In fact, as has already been shown, he explicitly makes the exact opposite claim: that we should make use of a variety of perspectives in our understanding of any issue.

For this reason then, it seems that Nietzsche could not possibly endorse anything like the explanatory primacy condition, and hence cannot be a fully fledged epiphenomenalist (even though he clearly endorses something along the lines of the causal primacy condition). Before moving on, however, it is worth making two further points. The first point, which may well be familiar by now, is that Nietzsche's endorsing the causal primacy condition does not constitute a threat to the very possibility of autonomy. This point is worth making, as Leiter's book treats Nietzsche's supposed epiphenomenalism in the section entitled "Critique of Free Will". Yet, as has been mentioned previously, in Nietzsche's most famous passage concerning free will (BGE 21) he criticizes both those who believe in the causal autonomy of the human will, *and* those who believe that freedom does not exist because the human will is not causally autonomous. Hence, Nietzsche himself obviously does not think human freedom is impossible simply because our thoughts and actions have prior causes.

The second thing worth considering is exactly how Nietzsche's endorsement of something like the causal primacy condition relates to my original question: namely, can our conscious thoughts play a role in the achievement of autonomy? In answer to this question, at least one thing is obvious: if any given person does achieve autonomy, this is not the result of any sort of spontaneous causality on the part of some conscious mental faculty they possess. In terms of whether Nietzsche can plausibly recommend that people consciously attempt to increase their degree of autonomy, however, the fact that Nietzsche endorses the causal primacy condition has very little bearing. If Nietzsche endorsed the explanatory primacy condition, on the other hand, things might conceivably be different. After all, it would then be the case that any adequate account of a person's becoming autonomous would have to be given in terms of

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non-conscious factors. The nature of this process from the 'inside' would be at best a sideshow, and something of very little real interest.

Given what has already been said about Nietzsche's perspectivism, however, this simply cannot be the case. Rather, we would expect Nietzsche to be interested in *both* the non-conscious and environmental factors that contribute to a person becoming autonomous, *and* the sort of consciousness that the autonomous person has of himself and his deeds. Moreover, this is exactly what we find in Nietzsche's works—not only does he show an interest in the political and sociological (and even dietary) conditions of human flourishing, but he also shows great interest in the psychology of the free man, and the sort of self-relation that makes such autonomy possible.¹³

Moderate Readings: Consciousness as the Smallest Part of the Mind's Activity

Even if we do not wish to attribute some sort of thorough-going epiphenomenalism to Nietzsche, it is clear that his views on consciousness are still potentially problematic for the kind of reading I am putting forward. It may be the case that Nietzsche cannot (consistently) desire the total (or even near total) elimination of conscious processes from our explanations and self-understandings, but it is also equally clear that he does not want to leave his contemporaries' "ridiculous overestimation" of the role of consciousness in generating actions simply as it stands. In this section, then, I will look at a more moderate interpretation of Nietzsche's remarks about consciousness, and assess how this fits with the reading I have given so far.

To do this, I will begin by focusing on one passage in particular: BGE 32. As I will look at this passage in some detail, it will be worth quoting it almost in its entirety:

During the longest epoch of human history (which is called the prehistoric age) an action's value or lack of value was derived from its consequences; the action itself was taken as little into account as its origin. . . We can call this period the *pre-moral* period of humanity. At that point, the imperative "know thyself!" was still

¹³Pippin (2009) provides a very good analysis of the self-relation of the Nietzschean free individual.

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unknown. By contrast, over the course of the last ten millennia, people across a large part of the earth have gradually come far enough to see the origin, not the consequence, as decisive for the value of an action. By and large, this was a great event, a considerable refinement of outlook and criterion, an unconscious after-effect of the dominance of aristocratic values and the belief in “origin”, and the sign of a period that we can signify as *moral* in a narrower sense. This marks the first attempt at self-knowledge. Origin rather than consequence: what a reversal of perspective! And, certainly, this reversal was only accomplished after long struggles and fluctuations! Granted: this meant that a disastrous new superstition, a distinctive narrowness of interpretation gained dominance. The origin of the action was interpreted in the most determinate sense possible, as origin out of an *intention*. People were united in the belief that the value of an action was exhausted by the value of its intention. Intention as the entire origin and prehistory of an action: under this prejudice people have issued moral praise, censure, judgement, and philosophy almost to this day.—But today, thanks to a renewed self-contemplation and deepening of humanity, shouldn't we be facing a renewed necessity to effect a reversal and fundamental displacement of values? Shouldn't we be standing on the threshold of a period that would be designated, negatively at first, as *extra-moral*? Today, when we immoralists, at least, suspect that the decisive value is conferred by what is specifically *unintentional* about an action, and that all its intentionality, everything about it that can be seen, known, or raised to “conscious awareness”, only belongs to its surface and skin—which, like every skin, reveals something but *conceals* even more? In short, we believe that the intention is only a sign and symptom that first needs to be interpreted, and that, moreover, it is a sign that means too many things and consequently means almost nothing by itself. We believe that morality in the sense it has had up to now (the morality of intention) was a prejudice, a precipitousness, perhaps a preliminary, a thing on about the same level as astrology and alchemy, but in any case something that must be overcome.

(BGE 32)

This passage, like many of those quoted before, contains a great deal of interesting material that cannot all be covered here. In broad outline, it posits three distinct phases in the evolution of mankind's practice of evaluating actions. During the first “*pre-moral* period”, which spans “prehistory”, actions are evaluated solely in terms of their consequences. Any action which has (or seems to have) negative effects on the family or the community at large is condemned, irrespective of the motive of the person in performing the act. This

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distant stage of human evaluative practice is not especially relevant to the point I am making here. The next two stages, however, are those that are of interest.

In the middle "*moral*" phase, according to Nietzsche, there occurs a "reversal of perspective". Instead of seeing the value of an action as residing solely in its consequences, people begin to take the origin of the action to be of decisive importance for determining its value. It is worth noting here that Nietzsche clearly approves of this development, as is shown by the fact that he calls it "a great event" and "a considerable refinement of outlook and criterion". Hence, as far as Nietzsche is concerned at least, man takes a step forward when he learns to take the origin of an action as being more important than its consequences for assessing its value.

Following hot on the heels of this positive development in mankind's practice of evaluation, however, comes another step in what Nietzsche takes to be the wrong direction: people become "united" in their belief in a "disastrous new superstition", namely that "the entire origin and prehistory of an action" is to be found in a conscious mental entity known as an intention. In other words, people start (and indeed continue all over the earth) to think that the true, and indeed only, causes of any human action are to be found within the consciousness of the agent in question, and hence that the value of any action is entirely determined by the value of its sole cause and origin—the intention which lies behind it.

Many of the passages already quoted in the previous section demonstrate that this development is not one which Nietzsche could endorse. Moreover, his language in the passage at hand amply demonstrates the same point. He calls the morality of intentions a "superstition", "a distinctive narrowness of interpretation", a "prejudice", and compares it to astrology and alchemy. It is due to the insufficiencies of the "*moral*" mode of evaluation, then, that Nietzsche proposes the move to the next "*extra-moral*" phase of mankind.

Nietzsche does not go into any sort of highly detailed analysis of what this "*extra-moral*" phase consists in here. Some things, however, are clear. For one, the "*extra-moral*" phase shares with the "*moral*" phase the belief that the origin of an action is more important than its consequences when assessing its value. The main difference between these two phases, on the other hand, lies in where

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they take this origin to lie. For the “*moral*” phase, as previously stated, the “entire origin and prehistory of an action” is to be found in the conscious intention which (supposedly) gives rise to it. For the “*extra-moral*” phase, by contrast, “the decisive value is conferred by what is specifically *unintentional* about an action”. This phrase is perhaps not as clear as it could be, but Nietzsche adds a bit more detail with the gloss that: “everything about [an action] that can be seen, known, or raised to ‘conscious awareness’, only belongs to its surface and skin—which, like every skin, reveals something but *conceals* even more”.

It seems fairly safe to say, then, that non-conscious factors will far outweigh conscious factors when determining the origin (and thereby the value)¹⁴ of an action in Nietzsche’s envisaged “*extra-moral*” phase of mankind’s development. It is worth noting immediately, however, that nowhere in this passage does Nietzsche suggest any sort of total neglect of the conscious processes involved in the genesis of an action. Rather, the most recent quote shows precisely the attitude towards consciousness that Nietzsche associates with this new phase: consciousness does indeed genuinely “betray” something about the value of an action, even though, if it alone is focused on exclusively, it “conceals still more”.

And this, I take it, provides a neat summary of the view of consciousness that a more moderate reading would attribute to Nietzsche. His core message is directed against what he takes to be the misguided self-understanding of the modern European. In line with this self-understanding, as Nietzsche sees it, people take themselves to be in full conscious control of their actions, with the conscious processes that proceed these actions being sufficient to cause them on their own, and with nothing else being needed to understand how they arise. Nietzsche’s counter-claim to people who hold this sort of belief is that these conscious processes are the tip of an extremely large iceberg. Our actions are not merely caused by our conscious intentions, but rather also have a wealth of subconscious, physiological, social and historical causes which, some individually and certainly when all taken together, far outweigh the importance of any of the conscious factors involved. These factors can be anything from facts about our diet, the tempo of our metabolism, the customs of our homeland,

¹⁴Possibly in terms of whether an action results from the “*superabundance of life*” (GS 370) or its opposite.

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features of our upbringing, the balance of power between our various drives, and even things such as the after-effects of the habits of ancient mankind which continue to lead a subterranean existence in the psyche of modern man (cf. D 18, for example, or BGE 264). It is worth emphasizing again though that even given that consciousness represents the tip of the iceberg that is the origin of an action, it is still part of that iceberg nonetheless, and should in no way be entirely disregarded in our understanding of its nature.

One question now remains. If this is the view of consciousness that is attributed to Nietzsche, what are the consequences of this for the understanding of autonomy that I have put forward thus far? Firstly, what it does not rule out is that possibility which I have trying to preserve up to now, i.e. the possibility of an individual consciously and deliberately deciding an ethic according to which they live their life and thereby achieve autonomy. It does, however, have some serious consequences for the way we must understand such cases. When a person does achieve autonomy through giving style to their character, or by binding themselves to their own law, or by whatever phrase we choose to use here, this can in no way be the whole, or even the majority, of the story of how they came to be autonomous. Rather, things such as facts about their constitution, their subconscious drives, their circumstances and their upbringing will also play the most significant role here as in any other cause. But a role will be played by this conscious formation of their character nonetheless, and Nietzsche's works taken as whole do not rule out this kind of deliberate cultivation of one's self—in fact, as is well known, there are many places which positively recommend it.¹⁵

One consequence of this view which some may find unpleasant, however, is that it does take the success of such an enterprise largely out of the agent's hands. In other words, merely forming some sort of ethic and directing all of one's efforts towards fulfilling it, even if this ethic 'fits' extremely well with one's conditions of existence, is not enough to guarantee achieving the highest levels

¹⁵This is particularly true of the works of what is sometimes called Nietzsche's middle period. See D 560, and GS 290, 299 and 335 for some good examples. The idea is certainly not exclusive to this period, however, and even in *Ecce Homo* when attributing his own cleverness to his "choice of nutrition. . . climate and location" (EH, "Why I am so Clever", 3) he emphasizes that these are *choices* and that we should exercise judgement and reason in relation to them.

of autonomy. One must, so to speak, be in the right place at the right time and even, if the phrase is permitted, be the right person. This may be an unpleasant truth but, importantly, it is a truth nonetheless in Nietzsche's eyes. Those that achieve autonomy are the "*strokes of luck*", and no amount of conscious effort on the part of an individual will help if that individual, for whatever reason, is not one of "the unusual cases of spiritual and physical powerfulness" (GM III: 14). From where Nietzsche stands, a modern individual without the right balance of drives can no more achieve autonomy by force of intellectual effort than could a prehistoric human being, existing prior to being made "predictable" by the "social straightjacket" (GM II: 2). The one consolation that can perhaps be offered to people who find this truth unpleasant is that it is often extremely difficult to tell whether one is such a person until after the fact, and that Nietzsche recommends that "[o]ne should regard oneself as a variable quantity whose capacity for achievement can under favourable circumstances perhaps equal the highest ever known" (D 326) in the meantime.

It is also worth making another thing clear. The fact that the achievement of autonomy is a matter of luck need not be seen as a problem for this sort of view. In some people's eyes, it might seem paradoxical to claim that autonomy is a matter of luck: if the causes of a person's autonomy are out of the person in question's hands, then what they have cannot really be autonomy, rather it is merely some natural process that befalls them and is outside of their control. For Nietzsche, I take it, there is no such problem. Once the "*causa sui*" conception of free will is rejected, the claim that the possession of the capacity for autonomous action must somehow be within the individual's power will lead to an infinite regress—it will require that every free act be the result of another free act. This second free act will then also have to be the result of another free act, and it is fairly easy to see that no end will be possible for such a chain of free acts. Moreover, I take it that this consequence of Nietzsche's view also sits fairly easily with some of our ordinary intuitions about autonomy: the fact that a person was born without any mental deficiencies which would make us rule out their capacity for free choice, and indeed the fact that they were born at all, are both chance events, but chance events which any sane theory would have to recognize as preconditions of their autonomy.

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Finally, it is also worth noting that attributing this view of the role consciousness to Nietzsche also fits perfectly well with the second possibility that I have kept open in the description of his views on autonomy that I have given so far: namely, that associated with the account Nietzsche gives of his own development in *Ecce Homo* whereby an individual becomes what they are without consciously or intentionally aiming to do so. In fact, it is only if one accepts a theory whereby facts other than those about our conscious processes can be decisive in determining the course of an individual's life that one can accept such an account as plausible at all, so this second possibility harmonizes very well with such a view. Therefore, if we accept the more moderate reading of Nietzsche's views on consciousness, one can become autonomous either through consciously directing one's life according to an ethic, or by having this done by aspects (or perhaps an aspect) of one's self that function(s) below the level of conscious awareness. In both cases equally, however, chance will play a large part, and individual striving (whether at the level of consciousness or not) will not be enough on its own.

The Value of Consciousness

As was mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, worries about the efficacy of our conscious thoughts only make up part of Nietzsche's deflationary account of consciousness. Aside from the questions he raises about our ability to determine both our actions and our beliefs using conscious means, he also puts forward some concerns relating to the *value* of consciousness for modern human beings. In this section, I will look at Nietzsche's grounds for questioning the value of consciousness, and examine whether these grounds rule out the possibility of conscious thought playing an important role in the life of an autonomous Nietzschean agent.

As I read Nietzsche, his negative remarks about the value of consciousness come in two different forms. At certain points, his worry about consciousness is that, due to its social origin, it is essentially a herd phenomenon, and that anything which rises to the level of consciousness can only be an expression of that which is common and average in the individual in question. At other points,

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Nietzsche's main concern is more about the degree of consciousness present in modern man: too much consciousness can be a bad thing in terms of the healthy functioning of the human (or indeed any) animal, and many moderns, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, already possess a degree of consciousness which far exceeds the ideal amount for leading a healthy life. In the next two sections I will examine these two strands of Nietzsche's thought in turn, before assessing their significance for the relation between autonomy and consciousness in the section called "The Value of Consciousness for Future Higher Individuals".

Consciousness as a Herd Phenomenon

When considering Nietzsche's claim that consciousness is a herd phenomenon, there is one passage in particular from Book Four of *The Gay Science* which deserves special focus. Whilst the whole passage is relevant to the topic under discussion, I will begin by quoting a couple of the most directly relevant parts:

My idea is clearly that consciousness actually belongs not to man's existence as an individual but rather to the community- and herd-aspects of his nature; that accordingly, it is finely developed only in relation to its usefulness to community or herd; and that consequently each of us, even with the best will in the world to *understand* ourselves as individually as possible, "to know ourselves", will always bring to consciousness precisely that in ourselves which is "non-individual", that which is "average"; that due to the nature of consciousness—to the "genius of the species" governing it—our thoughts themselves are continually as it were *outvoted* and translated back into the herd perspective.

(GS 354)

and a little further on in the same passage:

the world of which we can become conscious is merely a surface- and sign-world, a world turned into generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator,—that everything which enters consciousness thereby *becomes* shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, a sign, a herd-mark; that all becoming conscious involves a vast and thorough corruption, falsification, superficialization, and generalization.

(GS 354)

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In typical Nietzschean fashion, a great deal of content is packed into these short sections, and a bewildering variety of points are made in quick succession. The point relevant to the current section is fairly clear though: everything that happens at the level of consciousness is only that which is average and herd-like.

The reason why this so, on Nietzsche's account, lies in the origin of consciousness. Consciousness, according to Nietzsche "*developed only under the pressure of the need to communicate*" (GS 354). Due to the fragile nature of most (if not all¹⁶) human lives, people needed a way to quickly make their most pressing needs known to others, so as to get their assistance quickly and efficiently. Consciousness is the capacity that was developed to meet this need, and therefore to act as "a net connecting one person with another" (GS 354). This origin, however, deeply shaped the nature of consciousness. It was not developed in order to express the unique, the personal, or the individual, but rather to provide a simple and effective way for people to communicate about their most urgent needs—and these urgent needs are exactly those most basic ones which all people share.

These supposed facts about the origin and function of consciousness have big implications for the value of consciousness in Nietzsche's eyes. At the most general level, anything which is so closely related to the purposes of the "herd-aspects" of man's nature is bound to meet with Nietzsche's disapproval, and hence to immediately seem an unlikely candidate for integration into Nietzsche's positive project. Aside from this more general point, however, there is a more specific reason why conscious thought, if it is so inevitably linked to the "herd-aspects" of man's nature, cannot be linked to the Nietzschean conception of autonomy as I have tried to describe it so far.

As I argued in the previous chapter, living according to the dictates of what I called an ethic is a necessary condition of achieving autonomy. Moreover, in order to achieve the highest degrees of autonomy possible, this ethic must be such that it fits with, and where appropriate even enhances, that which is most specific and unique about the person who holds it. As Nietzsche puts this

¹⁶Nietzsche himself certainly did not seem to think that all human beings were in this state of need, as he says of consciousness that "the solitary and predatory person would not have needed it". (GS 354)

point, it must aid them in becoming who they are: “human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!” (GS 335). Yet, when we look back at the language used in the two parts of GS 354 that I quoted above, it seems as if consciousness must work explicitly against the discovery and creation of that which is “new, unique, [and] incomparable”. Nietzsche there associates that of which we become conscious as being thereby “non-individual”, “average”, “shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, a sign, a herd-mark”, as well as being corrupted, falsified, generalized, and made superficial. Therefore, if becoming autonomous necessarily involves working with everything about one’s self that is unusual and unique, then it seems that any activity which relies primarily on conscious thought, such as the deliberate creation of an ethic, could only act as a hindrance to a person’s becoming autonomous.

Consciousness as a Sickness

The fact that consciousness is essentially a social phenomenon is not the only reason Nietzsche provides for questioning its value. In addition to this, Nietzsche also questions the value of the heightened degree of consciousness possessed by modern Europeans. In fact, in the very section of *The Gay Science* with which the previous section dealt, Nietzsche says that “[i]n the end, the growing consciousness is a danger; and he who lives among the most conscious Europeans even knows it is a sickness” (GS 354). This criticism of the value of consciousness is obviously not totally unrelated to the concerns addressed in the previous section—after all, it is partly due to the fact that consciousness is a herd phenomenon that makes its increase a matter for concern. Yet Nietzsche also gives another, independent reason for seeing the “growing consciousness” of modern Europeans as not being a wholly positive phenomenon.

This further reason centres on Nietzsche’s belief “that ‘instinct’ is the most intelligent type of intelligence discovered so far” (BGE 218). At many points in his works, and in relation to many different topics, Nietzsche puts forward the idea that functioning according to unconscious instinct is by far preferable to functioning consciously. There are a number of different ways that such an idea

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can be supported. For one thing, virtually all of the most important functions of the human organism, and, non-coincidentally for Nietzsche, all of those that function with the most certainty, occur below the level of consciousness. Even those that do involve conscious thought need not, according to Nietzsche, and they gain nothing especially crucial from the “mirroring” (GS 354) they get in consciousness.

The previous point about consciousness relied partly on the fact that those activities which the human organism performs with most certainty are those which never rise to the level of consciousness. The same point can also be approached from the opposing angle though, by emphasizing the fact that we generally get better at activities proportionally to the degree to which we are able to perform them less consciously—or, as Nietzsche might put this same point, we get better at them proportionally to the extent to which we incorporate them and they “become an instinct” (GM II: 2). This example is a familiar one, and is not difficult to make: whether it be riding a bike, driving a car, learning a foreign language, playing a musical instrument or learning a sport, it is generally accepted that improvement involves having to consciously think less and less about the activity in question, and that the ideal state is to have these things come so naturally to us that they are ‘second nature’ and something that we can do ‘without even thinking about it’.

It is worth noting here that Nietzsche, as was the case with the term ‘consciousness’, uses the term ‘instinct’ in what might appear to be a slightly idiosyncratic way. This is brought out particularly clearly by the previous point. By many people’s understanding, an instinct is something along the lines of an innate or inborn capacity of an animal to react in a particular way to certain types of stimuli or circumstance. If this is correct, however, then Nietzsche’s talk of things *becoming* an instinct (and his parallel talk of instincts disappearing and weakening) may seem to verge on being nonsense—a capacity cannot either become or stop being innate. That Nietzsche endorses such talk is undeniable though. Take, for example, his talk in *The Gay Science* of embarking on the “*task of assimilating knowledge and making it instinctive*” (GS 11).¹⁷

¹⁷The meaning of this task, and in fact Nietzsche’s purpose in *The Gay Science* in general, is given a very illuminating discussion in Schacht (1988).

If one wanted to, it might be possible to try and bring Nietzsche's use of the term instinct more into line with the more conventional sense. He may, for example, only ever mean to imply that things can become instinct over the course of many generations—after all, anyone who accepts something along the lines of evolutionary theory must accept that instincts do gradually change over time, or else must make the unattractive claim that all of mankind's current instincts have been possessed by the creatures representing every earlier stage of his development, right down to the first single-cell organisms that appeared on the face of the earth. Hence, when Nietzsche talks of mankind gaining or losing instincts, it may only be in this long-term sense. And, wherever he seems to suggest that we should somehow embark on the task of making something instinctive, he may simply be suggesting that we should attempt to begin this long process by ourselves taking on the new qualities we desire mankind to incorporate as what he elsewhere calls a "second nature" (D 455). We may never live to see these qualities become instincts ourselves, but we can have the "noteworthy consolation. . . of knowing that [our current] first nature was once a second nature and that every victorious second nature will become a first" (UM II: 3). Whilst this line of reasoning is plausible enough, however, and certainly contains more than a grain of truth, I still think that most people who read Nietzsche will (correctly) come away with the impression that he believes that instincts can be both gained and lost in much shorter spaces of time than most people would normally suppose (cf. for example his claim in BGE 239 that women's "feminine instincts" have undergone a significant "weakening and softening" since the French Revolution, i.e. in less than one century).

Here is also one of the places where it is worth returning to the distinction made at the very beginning of this chapter between two senses of the word 'consciousness' that are in play in Nietzsche's works. This is because instinct, as Nietzsche understands it, is only opposed to consciousness in one of these two senses. When Nietzsche talks of an action being instinctive, he is not trying to imply that the agent in question performed it without having any sensory awareness of their surroundings. Rather, instinct is only opposed to consciousness as a reflective and deliberative capacity. Hence, to say an action was performed instinctively, for Nietzsche, means that it was not done on the basis of

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explicit reasons—the drive which impelled the person to perform the action in question simply *commanded*, it did not offer itself to the conscious intellect as an option with considerations in its favour.¹⁸

To get a clearer picture of the difference Nietzsche sees between functioning consciously and functioning according to instinct, it will be useful to return to the following passage from the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*. At this point, Nietzsche is drawing an analogy to capture the situation that faced mankind when they were first “imprisoned within the confines of society and peace”:

It must have been no different for these semi-animals, happily adapted to the wilderness, war, the wandering life and adventure than it was for the sea animals when they were forced to either become land animals or perish—at one go, all instincts were devalued and “suspended”. Now they had to walk on their feet and “carry themselves”, whereas they had been carried by the water up till then: a terrible heaviness bore down on them. They felt they were clumsy at performing the simplest task, they did not have their familiar guide any more for this new, unknown world, those regulating impulses that unconsciously led them to safety—the poor things were reduced to relying on thinking, inference, calculation, and the connecting of cause and effect, that is, to relying on their “consciousness”, that most impoverished and error-prone organ! I do not think there has ever been such a feeling of misery on earth, such a leaden discomfort

(GM II: 16)

Whilst Nietzsche's main point in this passage is not actually to present the advantages of having one's life guided by unconscious “regulating impulses” as opposed to by conscious reflection,¹⁹ it still provides a neat summary of a familiar Nietzschean view: healthy organic life functions according to instincts that

¹⁸Although even this is complicated by some of Nietzsche's other assertions. In the section of *Twilight of the Idols* discussed below, for example, Nietzsche endorse a strong opposition between reason and instinct. In an early remark from *Beyond Good and Evil*, however, he says that “the greatest part of conscious thought must still be attributed to instinctive activity, and this is even the case for philosophical thought”. In the same passage, he also says that it is a mistake to see “‘consciousness’ [as] *opposed* to instinct in any decisive sense—most of a philosopher's conscious thought is secretly directed and forced into determinate channels by the instincts” (BGE 3). I take it that Nietzsche's focus on the activity of philosophers here shows that he is thinking of consciousness in the narrower sense of a rational and deliberative faculty.

¹⁹The actual point of this passage is to emphasize the scale of the effect on human life when they made the sudden shift from a “formless” (GM II: 17) nomadic lifestyle to a life in what is recognizably a state. That Nietzsche takes this shift to be sudden and not gradual is clear from the content of GM II: 17.

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work below the level of consciousness, and guiding one's life through conscious thought is a sign of a dangerous decline of a once healthy set of instincts.

A further example of this can also be found in Nietzsche's treatment of the decline of Greek civilization, and the role he takes Socrates to have played in this decline. When treating this topic talk of instinct, and its counterpart reason (or dialectic, as Nietzsche also sometimes calls it), occurs frequently.²⁰ The following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* provides a particularly good example:

The old theological problem of "faith" and "knowledge"—or, to be more precise, of instinct and reason—and so, the question of whether, with respect to the value of things, the instincts deserve more authority than reason (reason wants some ground or "what for?", some purpose or utility behind our values and actions)—this is the same old moral problem that first emerged in the person of Socrates

(BGE 191)

Nietzsche's attitude towards Socrates is certainly not straightforward, and any discussion is hindered by the fact that he references him in many different contexts and for many different reasons.²¹ For the purposes of my current discussion though, I will focus upon the section of the *Twilight of the Idols* called "The Problem of Socrates". Here, Nietzsche's story runs roughly as follows: in the early, non-décadent days of Greek society, people functioned according to instinct. They did not need or approve of dialectic and the giving of reasons, and believed in the authority of that which came naturally to them:

Before Socrates, dialectical manners were rejected in good society: they were seen as bad manners, they humiliated people. . . Nothing with real value needs to be proved first. Wherever authority is still part of the social fabric, wherever people give commands rather than reasons, the dialectician is a type of clown

(TI: "The Problem of Socrates", 5)

²⁰In the section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "The Problem of Socrates", for example, talk of the opposition between reason/dialectic and the instincts runs through all the sections from 4 to 11.

²¹Kaufmann gives an excellent treatment of Nietzsche's attitude towards Socrates in Chapter 13 of *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*.

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This happy state did not, however, last forever, and the instincts of the ancient Greeks started to degenerate and to tend towards excesses of lust, greed and violence. Moreover, Socrates had a special insight into this degeneration of the instincts, as he himself presented a particularly advanced case of the same phenomenon: “[Socrates] understood that *his* case, his idiosyncrasy of a case was not an exception any more. The same type of degeneration was quietly gaining ground everywhere: old Athens was coming to an end” (TI: “The Problem of Socrates”, 9). So, to help his fellow citizens combat the newly arising tyranny of degenerate instincts, Socrates demonstrated to them his own solution to the problem. This involved opposing the tyranny of these degenerate instincts with a new kind of tyranny—the tyranny of reason over the instincts (cf. TI: “The Problem of Socrates”, 10).

This is obviously a highly truncated version of the story Nietzsche tells in “The Problem of Socrates”, and it misses out many of the nuances of the account Nietzsche gives there. The overall point, however, remains intact and provides further evidence for my main claim in this section—namely that, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, health and unconscious instinct go hand in hand, just as do sickness (or *décadence* as Nietzsche is fond of calling it in this section of *Twilight of the Idols*) and the preponderance of conscious reasoning. Or, as Nietzsche himself puts this point:

The most glaring daylight, rationality at any cost, a cold, bright, cautious, conscious life without instinct, opposed to instinct, was itself just a sickness, another sickness—and in no way a return to “virtue”, to “health”, to happiness. . . To *have* to fight the instincts—that is the formula for decadence: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness is equal to instinct.

(TI: “The Problem of Socrates”, 11)

The Value of Consciousness for Future Higher Individuals

In the previous two sections, I have put forward some of the criticisms that Nietzsche makes regarding the value of consciousness. These criticisms, fairly obviously, sit uneasily next to certain claims that I have made so far: most specifically, my claim that one way of achieving autonomy, on Nietzsche's view, is by

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consciously creating (and adhering to) a personalized ethic which enhances the flourishing of the individual in question. If, as Nietzsche maintains, consciousness is necessarily a levelling herd-phenomenon, which only deals in that which is common and average, and, moreover, is a sickness which stands in the way of a healthy functioning according to unconscious “regulating impulses”, then it seems unlikely that consciousness can play anything like this positive role in Nietzsche’s thinking. In this section, I will answer both types of concern with one response, and thereby show that there is still space in Nietzsche’s ideal of autonomy for conscious reflection to play a role.

Before giving this response, it will be worthwhile to say a little about what type of response I am going to give. My aim will not be to deny or downplay these aspects of Nietzsche’s thought. It is, in my opinion, undeniable that Nietzsche questions the value of consciousness, and moreover that he does so for the sort of reasons discussed above. The claim that I want to make, rather, is that Nietzsche’s worries about the value of consciousness are perfectly compatible with his allowing the possibility of conscious thought playing a beneficial role in the lives of future higher individuals who achieve the highest levels of autonomy.

The reason why both types of concern can be answered with a single response is because, in order to see either of them as presenting a problem for the reading of Nietzsche that I have put forward, another underlying assumption must be in place. This assumption is, put simply, that the origin and current value of consciousness determines what its value will be for future higher individuals. This assumption, however, goes directly against a central Nietzschean principle:

namely that the origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate; that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering, dominating*, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former “meaning” and “purpose” must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.

(GM II: 12)

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As this passage clearly shows, any attempt to use the existing state of consciousness to gauge what its value will be in the future for higher individuals is, in Nietzsche's eyes, an illegitimate move. The fact that consciousness is currently fairly described as an illness, as well as the fact that it currently serves the purposes of the 'herd', in no way rule out the possibility that it could be "transformed and redirected to a new purpose" by those individuals in the future (if there be any) who achieve the higher degrees of autonomy.

This might initially sound like a strange claim. If consciousness truly is a sickness, and if it really does only allow a person to deal with what is "shallow, thin, [and] relatively stupid", it might seem reasonable to conclude that there is no positive use that a higher individual could make of it, regardless of any efforts they might make. Yet, to see that Nietzsche does believe that something can be transformed from being a "sickness" into being something of positive value, we can compare it to another phenomenon that he believes can undergo a similar "reversal": namely "bad conscience" (GM II: 24).

The "reversal" of bad conscience is a topic I have touched briefly on before²² and it will not be necessary to go into any sort of extremely detailed analysis here. Suffice it to say though, that even the most cursory reading of the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* shows that bad conscience is not something Nietzsche considers to currently be of benefit to humanity. For example, towards the end of the Second Essay, when talking about the entanglement of bad conscience with religious ideas, Nietzsche says:

this man of bad conscience has seized on religious presupposition in order to provide his self-torture with its most horrific hardness and sharpness. Debt towards *God*: this thought becomes an instrument of torture. . . We have here a sort of madness of the will showing itself in mental cruelty which is absolutely unparalleled: man's *will* to find himself guilty and condemned without hope of reprieve, his *will* to think of himself as punished, without the punishment ever being equivalent to the level of guilt. . . Here is *sickness*, without a doubt, the most terrible sickness ever to rage in man

(GM II: 22)

²²During the final section of Chapter II, on pages 43-44.

This passage is unequivocal in the judgement it passes on bad conscience. Not only is it most certainly a sickness, it is in fact “the most terrible sickness ever to rage in man”. Yet, in spite of this damning indictment, it is only two sections later (in GM II: 24) that we find Nietzsche hoping that this very same bad conscience will be taken by someone possessing “*great health*” and transfigured into something positive by turning it against “all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life”. It is for this reason that Nietzsche is able to say that: “Bad conscience is a sickness, there is no point in denying it, but a sickness rather like pregnancy” (GM II: 19).

The implications of all this are clear. If a higher individual of the future, one possessing “*great health*”, is (at least in Nietzsche’s view) capable of converting “the most terrible sickness ever to rage in man” into something positive by turning it to a new purpose, then it seems at least equally possible that consciousness, despite currently being justifiably described as a sickness and a herd phenomenon, could also be put to a positive use by a higher individual of the future in the course of achieving autonomy. Therefore, Nietzsche’s critique of the current value of consciousness should not be seen as any sort of significant barrier to the incorporation of conscious thought into his positive project.

Final Thoughts on Consciousness

The arguments I have advanced so far have been intended to establish two different things. Firstly, that there is room in Nietzsche’s philosophy for conscious states to play some explanatory role in relation to action, and secondly that the capacity for conscious, reflective thought is capable of being a force for the good in the life of a Nietzschean higher individual. These two conclusions, however, actually look rather conventional for a philosopher who is normally considered to be such a radical critic of traditional philosophical beliefs. In fact, the twin beliefs that conscious states are the causes of actions, and that conscious reflection is a chief ingredient of the good life for man, have been shared by a great number of philosophers prior to Nietzsche.

This appearance of conventionality, however, is only an appearance. For whilst Nietzsche does endorse these fairly traditional sounding philosophical

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claims, he also marries them in both cases to a critique of the way he takes these claims to usually be understood. And, in both cases, the essence of his critique is basically the same: traditional philosophers have grossly exaggerated and overestimated the force of these claims.

The claim about the explanatory role of conscious states in relation to action, which was discussed at length on pages 122–128, provides a good example of this. Here, Nietzsche's claim that conscious states can play some, albeit fairly limited, role in the understanding or explanation of an action, needs to be seen against the background of what he takes to be the dominant view of the role of conscious states that he is opposing. According to this view, as Nietzsche understands it, conscious states are the *sole* causes of actions, and once we have understood the preceding conscious intentions, there is nothing more of interest to be known about how the action was generated. It is by comparison with this view, which Nietzsche takes to be the standard view of both his contemporaries and immediate predecessors,²³ that his own view, that our conscious states are one of the least significant determining factors of our actions, starts to seem other than conventional.

The story is analogous in the case of the second claim, that conscious reflection can play a positive role for a Nietzschean higher individual. This again sounds like a pretty standard philosophical claim, that would sit comfortably with the general trend of philosophical thought which is summed up nicely by Socrates' famous claim that "examining both myself and others is really the very best thing a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living" (Plato, 1993, p.63). Once again though, to see what is not standard in Nietzsche's position, we need to consider it in relation to his critique of this very trend of philosophical thought. As far as Nietzsche understands things, it is once again an almost universally accepted philosophical dogma that the capacity for conscious reflection is straightforwardly a good thing, and that conscious rational reflection on one's self and one's actions is a *necessary* component of the good life for human beings. This is, in Nietzsche's eyes at least, another great overestimation and exaggeration on the part of the philosophical tradition, only this time of the *value* of consciousness, as opposed to what we

²³Although admittedly he is very vague about exactly *when* this view gained dominance.

might call the power of consciousness. In opposition to this, Nietzsche wants to make what he takes to be the far less extreme claim: that the capacity for conscious reflection can be both harmful in some respects and beneficial in others, and that this capacity can play a part in the good life for human beings, but is by no means a necessary component of it.²⁴

Therefore, in the case of both these claims, it should be remembered that they are advanced as corrections to the highly inflated claims Nietzsche takes the philosophical tradition to make about both the power (both explanatory and causal) and value of consciousness. I will now conclude by noting some of the most significant consequences that follow from the overturning of this pair of philosophical overestimations.

The first such consequence is that any explanation of a person's behaviour solely in terms of conscious states will necessarily be seen by Nietzsche to be a very shallow explanation—one that deals only with surface phenomena, and which for that very reason may well disguise the true facts of the case more than it reveals them. An adequate explanation, on the other hand, will have to bring in non-conscious factors (such as facts about the non-conscious drives of the individual, their physiological constitution, their position in social and historical space and so on) and will be committed to the view that it is only when interpreted in the light of these non-conscious factors that our conscious states can be of any real explanatory use at all.

The second consequence is pretty much an application of the first consequence to the personal case: it involves a recognition that in one's own case, as in the case of others, the true causes of our actions lie in more than our conscious thoughts and intentions. This might at first sound like a purely negative insight, but I think it is in fact tied up with Nietzsche's belief in what might be called the ethical importance of "*the smallest and most everyday things*" (WS 6). For if we accept that the origins of our actions reach back further than merely to our conscious thoughts, it is not a great leap to seeing that a change in diet, for instance, can do just as much to improve our life, if not more, than any

²⁴Obviously talk of 'the good life for human beings' doesn't sound particularly Nietzschean, but I take it that this phrase is permissible so long as it is remembered that the sense of 'good' here is that which is opposed to 'bad', rather than that which is opposed to 'evil' (cf. GM I: 17).

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change in our beliefs. And this is a point Nietzsche himself makes frequently, as in the following passage from *The Wanderer and His Shadow*:

One should consider that *almost all the physical and psychical frailties* of the individual derive from this lack: not knowing what is beneficial to us and what is harmful in the institution of our mode of life, in the division of the day, in for how long and with whom we enjoy social intercourse, in profession and leisure, commanding and obeying, feeling for art and nature, eating, sleeping and reflecting; being *unknowledgeable in the smallest and most everyday things* and failing to keep an eye on them—this it is that transforms the earth for so many into a “vale of tears”.

(WS 6)

Moreover, this not merely something that Nietzsche is only concerned with in early writings such as this but runs throughout his writings, as is shown by his concern with issues surrounding things such as diet and climate in his last published book *Ecce Homo*.²⁵

Finally, the third consequence that I shall pick up on concerns exactly what the value of the capacity for conscious reflection finally is for Nietzsche. The answer to this is that the value of conscious reflection, like so many other things for Nietzsche,²⁶ is not something eternally fixed, but is rather *instrumental*: it is always a function of its current relationship to what Nietzsche often calls “life” or “health”. When conscious reflection acts as a force “*against* life” (GM P: 5), it meets with Nietzsche’s disapproval. This evaluation does not hold of consciousness in all times and all places for Nietzsche though, and it will meet with his approval wherever and in as much as it acts “in the service of life” (UM II: 1).

²⁵EH: “Why I am so Clever”, 1-3 are the sections of *Ecce Homo* where Nietzsche is most concerned with such issues. Good examples of this type of thinking can also be found in the writings between these two passages. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he says that “[b]ad cooking and the complete absence of reason in the kitchen have caused the longest delays and the worst damage to the development of humanity” (BGE 234). See also D 115 and GS 7. For a very interesting treatment of the ‘biologism’ present in Nietzsche’s thought, see Moore (2002).

²⁶Such as truth (BGE 4), historical sense (UM II), selfishness (TI: “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, 33) and religion (GM II: 23) to take but a few examples.

CHAPTER V

UNITY

The discussion of the role of consciousness in Nietzsche's ideal of autonomy that I undertook in the previous chapter has added more detail to the account that has been emerging. In general outline, however, the picture has remained the same—autonomy, or rather the *degree* of autonomy that a person possesses, is a function of the power of a person's will in relation to the wills of others, and of their ability to extend their will over long periods of time. Moreover, the achievement of the highest degrees of autonomy, and by extension the achievement of the greatest levels of power, requires imposing (whether knowingly or not) an ethic upon one's actions and one's self. There are several features that this ethic must have if it is adequately to perform its function: it must be self-chosen, rather than simply picked up from one's surroundings, it must act to give unity to the individual's various drives and affects, and it must be well tailored to the specific nature of the person who holds it.

Of all the elements of this account of autonomy, however, there is one that I have yet to examine in any real detail: the notion of *unity*. In this chapter, I will look to address this deficiency and give a more thorough analysis of the role this concept plays in Nietzsche's autonomy ideal.

To do this, I will begin by distinguishing two different types of unity that are at work in Nietzsche's account. In the first section of this chapter I will treat the first, more basic type of unity—the unity that each person possesses in virtue of having (or rather being) one and only one physical body. In this section I will argue that, in Nietzsche's eyes, it is the unity provided by the body

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which provides the most basic form of continuity for any given person, rather than any sort of supposed unity of consciousness. I will also show how this view links with the views on consciousness discussed in the previous chapter.

In the following section, I will discuss a more complex and interesting form of unity in Nietzsche's account: the sort of achieved unity amongst one's drives that Nietzsche associates strongly with autonomy. Here, I will highlight the reasons why the more basic form of unity, that of the physical body, is only necessary but not sufficient for autonomy, in Nietzsche's view. I will also look at what a unity of drives (or character, as it might also be put) amounts to, how it relates to autonomy, and also consider some of the ways this notion has been treated in the secondary literature.

After this, I will look at another concept that often goes hand in hand with unity in Nietzsche's works: that of *diversity*. Here, I will look at Nietzsche's claim that the ideal for human beings is not merely to unify their various drives, but rather to unify the most diverse array of potentially conflicting drives possible. My argument here will be that it is not some arbitrary or merely aesthetic preference on Nietzsche's part that makes him endorse this view. Instead, it is a consequence of the fact that greater degrees of power can be expected from those who successfully unify a vast number of conflicting or disparate drives, as opposed to those who only unify a collection of drives that are either relatively small in number, simple in nature, or else all fairly similar. I will also link this argument to some of Nietzsche's claims about the historical development of modern European man.

Finally, I will conclude by looking at an objection that could be made to Nietzsche's notion of unity: that it is a purely formal requirement, and is therefore perfectly compatible with the individual who achieves it being either highly despicable or extremely uninteresting. In my response to this, I will treat the two halves of this objection separately. As regards the first half, i.e. the claim that someone who achieved this type of unity might be a morally reprehensible character, I will essentially agree that this is possible, but question to what extent Nietzsche would see this as an objection at all. With regard to the second half, i.e. the idea that an individual who achieved this type of unity might yet still be a fundamentally dull or uninteresting character, I will claim that Nietzsche has

a couple of possible responses. Firstly, the insistence upon unity *and* diversity, rather than unity alone, goes some way towards assuaging this worry. Even if it is possible, however, for someone to unify a large number of diverse yet basically uninteresting drives, and hence remain a somewhat unimpressive person overall, this still need not be seen as a major problem for Nietzsche as unity alone is not his only standard for assessing people's worth. Rather, as power remains Nietzsche's basic standard, it may well be the case that such a person can be said to have achieved unity in Nietzsche's specialized sense, but still falls short according to this more fundamental standard of evaluation.

Basic Unity: The Body

The notion of unity is clearly an important one in Nietzsche's thinking on the nature and worth of human beings, and many commentators have picked up on this theme and subjected it to analysis. Moreover, at least some things seem to be fairly universally agreed upon. Firstly, there seems to be a general consensus that Nietzsche sees the type of unity he is interested in as being something that must be achieved, rather than something that is given merely in virtue of being a fully developed human adult. Coupled with this is usually the claim that such an achievement is not common, but rather difficult, arduous and consequently rare—particularly amongst the weak, effeminate and fragmented human beings that Nietzsche takes to constitute the vast majority of modern 'individuals'.¹ Another point that is frequently made is that this sort of achieved unity is not an all-or-nothing affair, but is rather a matter of degree, and can never be considered complete or fully achieved. In addition to this, many commentators also emphasize the fact that Nietzsche sees this kind of achieved unity as something akin to a worthwhile goal, a standard of evaluation for assessing people, or as a necessary component of becoming a 'higher individual'.

Given the number of commentators who make use of the concept of unity in their interpretations of Nietzsche, any sort of exhaustive list would be impractical. A few examples should suffice to give the general flavour though.

¹I put this term in scare quotes as there is a very definite sense for Nietzsche in which these people are not, in any strong sense, *single* individuals at all.

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Nehamas, whose analysis of Nietzsche's notion of the unity of the self in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* is amongst the best available, states: "The unity of the self, which therefore also constitutes its identity, is not something given but something achieved, not a beginning but a goal. And of such unity, which is at best a matter of degree and which comes close to representing a regulative principle, Nietzsche is not at all suspicious" (1985, p.182). Gemes, to give another example, stresses the difficulty involved with the achievement of this type of unity, and associates it with the sovereign individual, who he takes to be a Nietzschean ideal: "To have a character is to have a stable, unified, and integrated, hierarchy of drives. This is a very demanding condition that most humans fail to meet. . . The sovereign individual, who has a unified, independent, protracted will counts as having a genuine character, being a person" (2009, p.38). And, as a final example, take the following statements made by Richardson, who also gives an excellent account of Nietzsche's notion of unity: "Nietzsche thinks the unity of a person is never complete—this is why he sometimes denies any persons exist—but a matter of varying degree. . . the extent of unification achieved by a person's drives is a major valuative standard by which Nietzsche ranks him" (1996, p.48–9).

Before looking at the issues relating to this kind of achieved unity, however, I want to look at a more basic type of unity that is being presupposed here. Some further elaboration will be needed to make what I am getting at here a bit clearer. As was mentioned above, the type of unity that is usually discussed in connection with Nietzsche is a goal to be constantly striven towards, rather than any fixed or static state. Moreover, it is a goal that is rarely achieved, and most people exist not as living unities but rather as "the fragments and limbs of human beings. . . in ruin and scattered about as if on a battle field or a butcher field" (Z II: "On Redemption"). Yet, it is clear that, if we are to be able to distinguish between people in terms of the degree of unity that their characters/drives instantiate, there must be some more fundamental sense in which every person, irrespective of the degree of unity their character possesses, can be identified as a single person. Put another way, there must be some basic form or sense of unity belonging to every person, in order for us to be able to make any evaluative judgements using the notion of achieved unity outlined

above. This more fundamental unity, on Nietzsche's account, is provided by the unity of the physical body.

Obviously this claim needs to be qualified. As with the character (or, what amounts to the same thing for Nietzsche, the rank-order of drives and affects) of a person, the body is not a unity in the sense of a simple singularity. The physical body, like the human 'soul' as Nietzsche understands it, is composed of many different elements, and any unity that is present is going to be something like a harmonious unity, i.e. where all the parts co-operate towards a single end, rather than the sort of unity possessed by things which are simple or indivisible. The reason why the body can act as a more fundamental unity, therefore, is not because it itself is a unity in some more basic way. Rather, it is because the functional unity of the body is far more stable and well established than the unity of a person's character tends to be. This, I take it, is at least part of the point Nietzsche is making in the following passage:

The body is a great reason, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, one herd and one shepherd.

Your small reason, what you call "spirit" is also a tool of your body, my brother, a small work- and plaything of your great reason.

"I" you say and are proud of this word. But what is greater is that in which you do not want to believe—your body and its great reason. It does not say I, but *does* I.

What the sense feels, what the spirit knows, in itself that will never have an end. But sense and spirit would like to persuade you that they are the end of all things: so vain are they.

Work- and plaything are sense and spirit, behind them still lies the self. The self also seeks with the eyes of the senses, it listens also with the ears of the spirit.

Always the self listens and seeks: it compares, compels, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the ruler of the ego.

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a powerful commander, an unknown wise man—he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body.

There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows to what end your body requires precisely your best wisdom?

Your self laughs at your ego and its proud leaps. "What are these leaps and flights of thought to me?" it says to itself. "A detour to my purpose. I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its concepts."

(Z I: "On the Despisers of the Body")

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Obviously a large part of Nietzsche's aim here is to emphasize the subservience of the seeming goals of the "spirit" to the far more powerful goals of the body. While he doesn't put it in these terms here though, the reason why the body is such a "great reason" and "powerful commander" in relation to the "ego" is because, whilst both body and ego are organized multiplicities, the organization of the body is by far the far better established of the two.

There are presumably numerous reasons for such a fact. The most obvious, perhaps, is that the body has simply been around longer than what we call the conscious ego, which is, on Nietzsche's account at least, "the latest development of the organic, and hence also its most unfinished and unrobust feature" (GS 11). Aside from this, however, Nietzsche also suggests several other reasons why the structural coherence of modern man's psyche is not what it might be: the inhibition of a great deal of natural aggressive instincts due to socialization, and the self-laceration that results from turning these instincts back against their very possessors; years spent under the influence of a self- and world-slandering religious world-view; and the confusion of conflicting drives found in people due to the all-too-sudden mixing of races, to name a few examples.²

The importance of the body in providing the site upon which different drives can compete, coerce and co-operate, and as providing the basic unity against the background of which the unity of a person's character can either be achieved or fail to be achieved, has not always been picked up upon by commentators.³ The reason for this, I take it, is not any sort of negligence. Rather, it is that this point is, in many ways, an obvious one. I mainly bring it up here because it ties in with the themes of the previous chapter in a couple of interesting ways.

Firstly, the emphasis Nietzsche lays on the superior organization of the body as being what accounts for a person's identity over time is intended to contrast with any account that explains personal identity in terms of any sort

²References for all these points can be found in the *Genealogy* at GM II: 16, GM II: 22 and GM III: 17 respectively.

³A notable exception to this is Nehamas, who writes: "On a very basic level the unity of the body provides for the identity that is necessary, but not at all sufficient, for the unity of the self... Because it is organized coherently, the body provides the common ground that allows conflicting thoughts, desires, and actions to be grouped together as features of a single subject" (1985, p.181).

of individual spiritual entity such as a soul, or by means of a distinct single faculty of consciousness which stands behind and accounts for all of a person's perceptions, feelings and thoughts. As we have seen, an important part of Nietzsche's thinking is the splitting of the human soul into a society of distinct elements, and his account of the body plays a large role in this.

In addition to this, Nietzsche's understanding of the body also ties into another aspect of his understanding of consciousness that we looked at in the previous chapter. As the lengthy quote from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* above shows, Nietzsche's account of the body strongly implies that, when considering human agency, we should give heavy explanatory preference to non-conscious elements. Because the organization of the body is so much more naturally coherent and deeply-established than that amongst a person's drives and affects, the "unknown sage" that constitutes the whole bodily self plays a far larger role in the determining of what a person does than the "small work- and plaything" that is their conscious ego. This, as we saw in the previous chapter, is one of the major thrusts of Nietzsche's writings on consciousness in general—which explains many aspects of his philosophy, from his suspicion of explanations in terms of conscious motivations to his interest in, and belief in the hitherto unappreciated importance of, things such as climate, diet, exercise, and all the other sorts of things discussed at the end of the previous chapter in connection with people's lack of knowledge concerning "*the smallest and most everyday things*" (WS 6).

Further Unity: The Character

As has already been mentioned, the unity of the body is not Nietzsche's primary concern when he shows concern about the unity of modern man. Unity among the different parts of the body is something that is enjoyed without effort in the vast majority of human beings, although admittedly something that can be maintained in better or worse ways by one's style of life. Nietzsche's interest, rather, is in the unity of what might be called a person's 'soul' or 'character'. This unity of character, in contrast to the unity of the body, is something Nietzsche believes is rarely to be found in modern European man, hence his

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conviction that it is this type of unity, and not that of the body, which needs urgent attention.

One point which needs to be immediately, although briefly, addressed is one which takes its cue from the previous section. This is to stress that the difference in the degrees of unity displayed by the character and the body respectively is not to be explained by any fundamental difference between the two types of thing under consideration. The soul of modern man is not less unified than his body because it is made of some different, more complex material than that of the body. Rather, the difference is basically contingent and historical. In other words, modern man's soul is less unified than his body only because of the sorts of reasons given above: the fact that it is a more recent development of the organic than its counterpart, along with a collection of historical reasons linked to the development of ascetic religious views and the interbreeding of different races. Hence we should not see the unequal degrees of unity possessed by these two different aspects of modern man as arising from any sort of hard and fast body/soul distinction.

With this point out of the way, it will be worth looking in a little more detail at the nature of the problem at hand. The basic point is, I think, that Nietzsche believes most modern European people have (or are) a disordered and disorderly collection of drives, showing no rhyme, reason or ultimate coherence. As I have already touched on the causes of this condition a couple of times, I will not approach this issue from that direction. Instead, I will look at how this problem reveals itself. This is not a problem that has any one single and obvious result, but rather manifests itself in a variety of different ways. A comprehensive list of all the ailments that Nietzsche believes arise from this condition would take up far too much space and would perhaps never be complete. So, instead I will use the next few paragraphs to look at a few prominent examples.

One consequence of the fragmented nature of the modern self is that people contain multiple and conflicting value standards within themselves. The most obvious example of conflict between value standards, at least as far as Nietzsche's understanding goes, is between values of noble and slavish origins. As is well known, Nietzsche believes that all of the various "moralities"⁴ that do ex-

⁴Or various 'ethics', as the terminology of Chapter III would have it.

ist or have existed fall into two basic categories: “*master*” moralities and “*slave*” moralities. What is less well documented, however, is that Nietzsche believes that these two types of morality, at least in modern culture, are no longer pure and independent from each other, but rather tend to both exist side by side in the soul of modern man. Nietzsche makes this point explicitly in the section of *Beyond Good and Evil* where he discusses the distinction between these two types of morality:

As I was wandering through the many subtle and crude moralities that have been dominant or that still dominate over the face of the earth, I found certain traits regularly recurring together and linked with each other. In the end, two basic types became apparent to me and a fundamental distinction leapt out. There is a *master morality* and a *slave morality*;—I will immediately add that in all higher and more mixed cultures, attempts to negotiate between these moralities also appear, although more frequently the two are confused and there are mutual misunderstandings. In fact, you sometimes find them juxtaposed—inside the same person even, within a single soul.⁵

(BGE 260)

Whilst Nietzsche makes this point in the abstract here, it is not difficult to make the idea more concrete. Most people, for example, have no problem empathizing with, or at least imaginatively supporting, a classic ‘hero’ figure from a film or novel—someone who is bold, fearless and courageous, and who has little regard for how many opponents need to be vanquished in pursuit of his overall goal. Yet, in another context, the very same person will have no difficulty in getting affectively behind what we might describe as a ‘moral hero’ in the narrower sense of the word moral—someone who fights for the humane treatment of all people, their opponents included, and passionately believes that ‘violence never solves anything’, as the saying goes. Or, to give an example that is closer to home, we might cite Nietzsche’s own method in the *Genealogy*. In that book, Nietzsche deliberately plays on the mixed valuative sensibilities of his readers in order to get them to recognize, and eventually question, their own deeply held emotional responses (or “moral prejudices” (GM P: 2) as Nietzsche

⁵A similar point is also made at the end of the First Essay of the *Genealogy*, cf. GM I: 16.

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would call them).⁶ At certain points, he draws a sort of reverent awe from his readers towards the healthy and active life of the nobles, whilst at other points he makes his audience pull back in disgust from their capacity for cruelty and heartlessness towards their inferiors and conquered foes. And similarly with the slaves and their spiritual leader the ascetic priest: at some junctures Nietzsche elicits contempt for the vengeful, underhand and ultimately mendacious nature of their “revolt” against the nobles. At other times, however, even Nietzsche himself cannot hide his admiration for “awe-inspiring consistency” and sheer level of intelligence they show in overcoming their physically and socially superior tormentors, so much so that he even says: “nobody else’s intelligence [*Geist*] stands a chance against the intelligence [*Geist*] of priestly revenge” (GM I: 7). Hence, a large part of Nietzsche’s method in the *Genealogy* relies on his assumption that a modern reader will not side unequivocally with either of these two viewpoints, but will rather be able to side with both at different times due to the fact that they contain elements of both value standards within themselves.

The fragmentation of the modern self does not only mean that people now contain multiple moralities within themselves, but also extends into other kinds of value standards as well, such as aesthetics or broadly culture value standards concerning things such as fashion and manners. The practical result of our modern internal disorder in this area, according to Nietzsche, is that modern culture does not really have any sort of recognizable “taste” of its own, but is rather capable of understanding almost any and every taste from the past to a certain degree. This is another point which Nietzsche makes explicitly in *Beyond Good and Evil* in relation to the newly developed “historical sense” of mankind:

this historical sense that we Europeans claim as our distinguishing characteristic comes to us as a result of that enchanting and crazy *half-barbarism* into which Europe has been plunged through the democratic mixing of classes and races,—only the nineteenth century sees this sense as its sixth sense. Thanks to this mixture, the past of every form and way of life, of cultures that used to lie side by side or on top of each other, radiates into us, we “modern souls”. At this point, our instincts are running back everywhere and we ourselves are a type of chaos—. “Spirit”, as I have said, eventually finds this to its own advantage. Because of the half-barbarism in our bodies and desires, we have secret entrances

⁶This point is also made by Janaway in *Beyond Selflessness*. See Chapter 12 in particular.

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everywhere, like no noble age has ever had, and, above all, access to the labyrinths of unfinished cultures and to every half-barbarism that has ever existed on earth. And since the most considerable part of human culture to date has been just such half-barbarism, the “historical sense” practically amounts to a sense and instinct for everything, a taste and tongue for everything⁷

(BGE 224)

In this section of the passage, it almost sounds as if Nietzsche is extolling the virtues of the “historical sense”, and to some extent this is true: Nietzsche does think that possession of the historical sense gives modern man certain qualities which men from previous centuries could only dream of, and which allow him a sort of direct access to a vast range of different cultural sentiments and practices both past and present. However, as Nietzsche makes clear later on in the same passage, the price that is paid for this ability to ‘get inside’ other cultures is high indeed, and essentially amounts to no longer possessing the necessary prerequisites for modern man possessing any genuine culture of his own. Yet, whether we consider this capacity in its positive or negative aspect, its connection to the disunity of modern man remains the same, and is summed up neatly by Nietzsche in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*:

Regarded as a phenomenon for the eyes, however, and compared with the phenomena of life of earlier times, the existence of modern men exhibits an unspeakable poverty and exhaustion, despite the unspeakable gaudiness which can give pleasure only to the most superficial glance. If one looks a little more closely and analyzes the impression made by this vigorously agitated play of colours, does the whole not appear as the glitter and sparkle of countless little stones and fragments borrowed from earlier cultures? Is everything here not inappropriate pomp, imitated activity, presumptuous superficiality? A suit of gaudy patches for the naked and freezing?

(UM IV: 5)

The various value-standards contained in modern man due to his fragmented nature are also related to another symptom that Nietzsche believes results from

⁷A similar point is also made in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. See UM II: 7-10 in particular.

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this condition: paralysis (or weakness) of the will. This can be seen clearly in the following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche is discussing the rise in popularity of a certain style of “lulling poppy scepticism”⁸ in the modern world:

Scepticism is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition which in layman's terms is called weak nerves or sickly constitution. It originates whenever races or classes that have been separated for a long time are suddenly and decisively interbred. The different standards and values, as it were, get passed down through the bloodline to the next generation where everything is in a state of restlessness, disorder, doubt, experimentation. The best forces have inhibitory effects, the virtues themselves do not let each other strengthen and grow, both body and soul lack a centre of balance, a centre of gravity and the assurance of a pendulum. But what is most profoundly sick and degenerate about such hybrids is the *will*: they no longer have any sense of independence in decision-making, or the bold feeling of pleasure in willing,—they doubt whether there is “freedom of will”, even in their dreams... Paralysis of the will: where *won't* you find this cripple today? And often how nicely dressed! How seductively dressed! This illness has the prettiest fancy-dress clothes and liar's outfits. And most of what presents itself in the shop window these days as “objectivity”, for instance, or “scientificity”, “*l'art pour l'art*”, or “pure, will-less knowing”, is only dressed-up scepticism and paralysis of the will,—I will vouch for this diagnosis of the European disease.

(BGE 208)

As can be seen from Nietzsche's talk of “different standards and values” in the “bloodline” of modern man, this condition is clearly linked to those already discussed. However, I think it is fair to say that Nietzsche's analysis in this passage adds another layer to those features already discussed. For so far we have mainly been considering the ‘intellectual’ results of the fragmentation of the modern soul—modern man's ability to understand and participate in the most

⁸Nietzsche is thinking here of scepticism in the classical sense of trying to suspend judgement on any and every issue, rather than in the more recent sense whereby being a sceptic about some issue, such as the existence of the external world, implies the positive belief that no proof or justification can be found of the phenomenon in question. In other words, the sort of scepticism associated with figures such as the Stoics and Montaigne and their “sworn loyalty to the word ἐπέχω: ‘I am in suspense’; I will not budge” (Montaigne, 2003, p.563), rather than the sort of scepticism that Wittgenstein is out to combat in works like *On Certainty*.

varied collections of moralities and cultural value-standards. Here, on the other hand, Nietzsche is pointing directly to what might be called a more ‘practical’ effect of the disunity that Nietzsche takes to be characteristic of the modern European: the inability, or at least the unwillingness, to decisively act. Once again, the link to the previous points is obvious. If one contains remnants of numerous different and conflicting value-standards, any action inspired by any given one of these is liable to come into conflict with one or some of the others. Nietzsche’s point in emphasizing the “paralysis” of the will, however, is to bring out what he takes to be a distinctive type of response to this condition that is becoming prevalent. This is to attempt to avoid taking any definite action or holding any specific view whatsoever—to attain a sort of consistency by becoming a spectator on life, an ‘objective’ merely mirroring observer of that which is happening all around, and a passive subject who merely contemplates the manifold collection of objects that are given to him through his senses.⁹

Holding back from active participation in life is of course not the only, and probably not even the most common, practical response to the disunity of the modern soul. Alongside it, there is also the option of turning this ‘inner’ inconsistency into ‘outer’ inconsistency. This occurs when people simply follow their immediate inclinations and let whichever of their drives is in the ascendancy at a given time determine their actions. Given the confused state in which their drives begin, however, the collection of actions that result from such a procedure tend to be equally confused as well. Here we have Nietzsche’s picture of modern individuals as “slaves of the mood and desire of the moment”¹⁰ (GM II: 3) who share “an inability to resist a stimulus” and who therefore obey “every impulse” (TI: “What the Germans Lack”, 6). In this case, we have an almost opposite response to the problem at hand to that exhibited by those who experience “paralysis” of the will. Instead of withdrawing from definite action¹¹ through despairing of the possibility of ever acting consistently, any attempt at

⁹This might constitute one thread of a Nietzschean analysis of a tendency that Heidegger diagnoses in *Being and Time* to give priority to seeing the world as “present-at-hand”, rather than as “ready-to-hand” (1962, p. 142).

¹⁰Nietzsche is not actually talking about modern man when he uses this phrase, but it does sum up his view of many moderns very nicely.

¹¹Or at least attempting to do so. Obviously literally doing nothing is impossible, in the same way as staying perfectly still remains a choice about how to move one’s body.

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consistency is sacrificed for the sake of action. Men of this sort essentially live in the constant present, continually satisfying whichever of their immediate desires is strongest, and displaying little or no overall consistency in the pattern of their lives.

Whilst the disunity of the modern soul is often best characterized by the notion of a confused, piecemeal fragmentation, this is not the only form it can take. Another form (or perhaps manifestation) of this disunity can also be found in men who are extremely over-developed in one, and only one, direction: men who are “squashed beyond recognition. . . completely emaciated and jagged except for one spot that is paradigmatically round” (GS 366). Nietzsche's most sustained description of such men, who Nietzsche charmingly calls “inverse cripples”, is given in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where he describes them as:

human beings who [are] missing everything except the one thing they have too much of—human beings who are nothing more than one big eye, or one big maw or one big belly or some other big thing—inverse cripples I call such types.

. . . “That is an ear! An ear as big as a person!” And I looked more closely, and really, beneath the ear something was moving that was pitifully small and pathetic and thin. And, in truth, the gigantic ear sat upon a little slender stalk—but the stalk was a human being! If one used a magnifying glass one could even recognize a tiny, envious miniature face; even a bloated little soul dangling on the stalk.

(Z II: “On Redemption”)

Initially, the difference between those who are “missing everything except the one thing they have too much of” and those who possess a diversity of elements that is far too great may seem massive. In fact, however, they are both simply different variants of the same phenomenon of disunity. In both cases, what is essentially happening is a detriment to the whole being caused by the relations between the parts. The only real difference is that here, as opposed to in the case of a fragmented disunity, it is the *excessive* dominance of one part, rather than the roughly equal degree of dominance possessed by various heteronomous parts, that is at the root of the conflicted nature of the individual.

I will now draw a close to my consideration of the various effects Nietzsche takes the disunity of the modern soul to have on people. This last point,

however, leads nicely into my next task: showing why Nietzsche thinks this disunity poses such a threat to the autonomy of the individual. As I have argued in previous chapters, Nietzsche takes the degree of an individual's autonomy to be essentially a function of the power of their will in relation to other forces—the autonomous individual is the one with a “*strong*” rather than a “*weak*” will (BGE 21), who is active and determining in relation to the external forces that bear on him, rather than reactive and merely responsive. And the reason why disunity, whether it be caused by fragmentation or by the over-preponderance of one characteristic, is harmful to such strength of will is basically because it divides the power of the individual and turns it against itself. Instead of the “quantum of force” (GM I: 13) that is available to an individual being directed in any sort of concerted fashion, it is instead squandered largely on the internal battle that is going on between the various conflicting aspects of the individual in question.

The ideal of unity is Nietzsche's recommendation in the face of this problem: the individual who wishes to achieve autonomy (or the higher degrees of autonomy) needs to impose a unity upon the “fragments, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, [and] chaos” (BGE 225) that is his given nature. It should be noted immediately, however, that the exact details of this ideal are far from clear, and certainly need further elaboration. And for this purpose, I think there is no better means than looking briefly at some of the comparisons used by both Nietzsche and also by commentators to elucidate this notion. There are a number of such comparisons available, and my aim here will not be to give an in-depth analysis of each one—that task would take up a whole chapter, or perhaps even a whole thesis, in itself. Rather, what I aim to do is to give a brief description of each, and to bring out a feature of Nietzsche's conception of unity that this specific type of analogy brings out particularly well. I will then take a step back, and try to give a slightly more comprehensive view of what all these different types of imagery are all, in their different ways, aiming at.

The first such comparison is, as we might call it, horticultural: we should imagine the sort of unity that an individual imposes on their character as being analogous to the sort of unity that a gardener imposes upon the landscape with which he works. The main passages for this sort of imagery are to be found

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at *Daybreak* 560 and *The Gay Science* 290. And the key thing to take from these sorts of passages, I would suggest, is the extent to which the creation of a unified character does not amount to anything like an unrestricted or entirely free act of creation. In order to get clearer about why this is so, let us think for a second about our imagined gardener. It seems fairly obvious that his best bet would certainly not be to design the garden in question before having any notion of what the landscape he is going to be working with is like. Rather, if he is going to be successful in his endeavour, he must know the nature of the space he is working with and what possibilities it realistically offers him. And the same is true, in Nietzsche's eyes, with respect to the person who tries to create a unified character out of the materials offered by his already existing self. He cannot simply create whatever character he desires, but must work on what is already there. This is brought out particularly well by thinking about the circumstances in which a person will start to get to grips with the task of unifying their character. Inevitably, this will not be a process which they will be able to deliberately direct from their birth upwards. Rather, it is something that they will begin to do, if at all, only later in their life. And by the time they become aware of possibility of such intentional character-formation, they will already have a character that has been formed in very definite ways by their upbringing and the experiences that they have had in their life thus far. There is no way of undoing what they have already done, and whilst it may be possible for them to alter some of their basic character traits, the idea of wiping the slate clean and starting again is clearly fantasy. Hence, on Nietzsche's view at least, they must take a more practical and realistic approach: where there is something "ugly that [cannot] be removed" it must be "concealed", and that which is "vague and [resists] shaping" must be "saved and employed for distant views" (GS 290).

Another comparison that Nietzsche is fond of using is the political: the unity of a person's character is similar to the sort of unity that exists between the different elements of a body politic. *Beyond Good and Evil* 12 and 19, along with GM II: 1, provide some good evidence of this sort of imagery within the published works. And here the stress should be laid on the hierarchical or organizational nature of the unity that Nietzsche is recommending in his writings.

This is important as it mitigates against the sort of ‘visual’ or ‘corporeal’ understanding of unity that can be tempting to fall into at times. The unity of a soul is less a matter of all the ‘pieces’ fitting together like a jigsaw, and more a matter of the various aspects of our character having a role or function within the whole, and, ideally at least, not rebelling against the structure at hand or their place within it. In other words, the organization displayed between the different aspects of a person’s soul will be the sort of organization that arises through well-ordered relations of governing, obeying and co-operating between the drives, rather than the sort of organization one might achieve through arranging physical objects into categories so that they are easy to manage and manipulate.

Of all the comparisons that Nietzsche uses, however, the one which has received the most attention is the artistic: the sort of unity that is displayed by Nietzsche’s ideal type of man is analogous to the sort of unity to be found in works of art. Section 290 of *The Gay Science* is once again a central passage here, but section 299 of the same work and section 225 of *Beyond Good and Evil* also link working on the raw materials of our self with artistic activity. Now obviously there are many different forms of art, and the main lessons to be drawn from the analogy will vary depending on which type of art we choose to focus on. The two forms of art that will be most useful for our purposes here, I would suggest, are literature and music—two forms of art very close to Nietzsche’s heart. Hence, to sharpen the analogy, we should think of the sort of unity displayed by a person’s character to be somewhat similar to the unity that is displayed by a fictional (or semi-fictional) character from a piece of literature¹² or by the different parts of a piece of music, whether it be something short like a song or something longer like a well-constructed symphony. Whilst there are obviously important differences between these two types of art, it is one of their similarities that I think most effectively brings out one of the features of the type of soul-unity that Nietzsche is trying to capture: namely, their temporal nature. The unity displayed by a literary figure, like that to be found

¹²This point is one of the central themes of Nehamas’ excellent book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* which, as already mentioned, provides one of the best accounts of the notion of unity in Nietzsche’s works available.

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between the different sections of a song or symphony, is not wholly present at any one moment. Rather, it is something that only emerges when considering the literary character or musical piece *as a whole*. It is this feature of the 'artistic unity' of such phenomena that sheds light on the sort of unity Nietzsche recommends to those who want to achieve the higher degrees of autonomy. Unity of character is not any sort of static state that one could either possess or fail to possess at a given time, but is rather something that is manifested in the whole series of an individual's actions over time. And, just as a literary character cannot fully manifest the sort of deep consistency we associate with a well-crafted literary character over the course of a lone paragraph, the unity of a real human being's character is not something which can be judged on the basis of a single moment: rather, it is something that can only reveal itself through many different actions, performed in a variety of different circumstances over a reasonable period of time.

All of these different analogies are useful in understanding Nietzsche's notion of unity, and none of them should be considered primary or vastly superior to the others. Aside from the individual features of Nietzsche's conception of unity that they each help to pick out, however, there are also a couple of more general points that they all presuppose.

The first such point concerns the nature of the relations that we should see as obtaining between all the various different aspects of the unified person's character. Nehamas is absolutely correct when he says that, on Nietzsche's view, "unity is unity only as co-operation" (1985, p.177). Yet, as reflecting on Nietzsche's choice of analogies shows, we should be careful about the exact way we think of such co-operation. When thinking of unity as co-operation, it can naturally seem as if Nietzsche is somehow saying that every part of an individual's psyche should have the same aim, as if unity was equivalent to the bloody-minded submission of every single moment of the person in question's life to the same concrete goal. If we think about the nature of the unity possessed by any of the types of object Nietzsche chooses for his comparisons, however, we will see that this is not so. All of the different parts of a good symphony do not need to conjure the same mood, any more than every action of coherent literary character needs to issue from the same basic motive or aim at some sin-

gle overarching goal. Or, put even more briefly, a good gardener does not plant only roses. Therefore, when thinking of the nature of unity as co-operation, we should resist thinking of it as simply meaning that all our drives and actions are directed towards a single concrete goal, and think of it more in terms of them all flowing naturally from some sort of coherent underlying *style*.

Another point that is suggested by Nietzsche's choice of analogies is that there is, so to speak, no definitive 'rulebook' we could hope to employ in judging the extent to which a person has attained unity. Rather, this question will always be somewhat open-ended, and the final court of appeal will always be the end-product itself. To make my point here clearer, let us take a literary character as our example. It goes without saying that no-one has ever produced a step-by-step manual that enables anyone to create their own unified literary character, and it is probably not going too far to say that no-one will ever do so.¹³ Granted, there are probably several rules of thumb that could be given. If, however, a great author created a powerful literary figure, unified in the sense being discussed here, that disobeyed these rules, we would take this as demonstrating the inadequacies of these rules of thumb, rather than seeing the author as being somehow at fault. And the same is true, I think it is fair to say, of the sort of unity that Nietzsche sees as being intimately linked to autonomy. There is no recipe for unity, any more than there is a recipe for making an aesthetically pleasing garden or for writing a beautifully crafted symphony. The ideal of unity provides no inviolable rules by itself, and it is only by a sort of aesthetic (or at least quasi-aesthetic) judgement of the living whole that is, or was, an individual that we can determine the extent to which their character displayed a stylistic unity.

The final point that I want to bring out from these various analogies is that they all also point to the fact that unity, in the sense being discussed here, is a matter of degree. To take an example from our list again, we might look at societies. It is clearly not the case that all societies fall into two well-defined camps: those that are unified and those that are not. Rather, every society will

¹³Unless, perhaps, the advice given is to make the character as simply as is humanly possible. But this method would, of course, almost certainly purchase the unity of the character at the cost of making them uninteresting and two-dimensional.

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display internal unity to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, owing to this fact, there is no obvious top, or indeed bottom limit to the unity that they possess. A society could seemingly always be either more or less unified than it currently is. These exact points also apply to the unity of a person's character. There is no threshold which, once crossed, enables someone to say "Now I am unified". Instead, an individual will always find themselves possessing a certain degree of unity which could either be improved or reduced by their future actions. Unity, therefore, is not a specific goal which an individual can be definitively judged to have either achieved or failed to achieve, but is rather an ongoing project where success (or indeed failure) are always a matter of degree.

These, I think, are the major points to be taken from the specific types of comparisons that Nietzsche opts for when elucidating his conception of unity. There are, however, a couple more things that are worth mentioned that are yet to be covered. The first, which is something of a commonplace when discussing Nietzsche's ideal of unity, is that achieving this ideal is a difficult task that requires discipline.¹⁴ This is backed up by Nietzsche's statement that the man who gives style to his character does so "through long practice and daily work at it" (GS 290), or by his claim that Goethe "*disciplined* himself to wholeness" (TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 49),¹⁵ to take but two examples. A unified soul, therefore, is no mean feat, and there will be much effort and self-control required by anyone who wishes to achieve it.

And this brings me on nicely to the final point I want to make in this section. Initially, it may sound slightly paradoxical to claim that self-control is needed in order to achieve unity. After all, unity is supposed to be a precondition of genuine autonomy and hence, we might suppose, of any reasonable level of self-control. It seems, therefore, as if we might be trapped in some sort of circle: we need self-control to attain unity, and unity in order to exercise self-control. This point would not be a worry for Nietzsche. The reason why such a circle seems troubling is because one cannot 'jump into it' at any point. Nietzsche, however, fully accepts this consequence. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche states that making one's self healthy "is possible—as any physiologist will admit—as long

¹⁴See, for example, Gemes (2009, p.37-39), May (2009, p.90-92) and Schacht (1983, p.307).

¹⁵Emphasis added.

as you are basically healthy” (EH: “Why I am so Wise”, 2). And the same thing, I would suggest, is basically true of making oneself unified to a high degree. Not everyone can achieve this task, and one of the preconditions of being amongst those who are capable of doing so is plausibly that one already, through what is basically luck, has a nature that is well suited to such treatment. A similar point was made about the extent to which one can exercise conscious control over one’s actions in the previous chapter, and here our instincts may be somewhat similar: naturally, when we are presented with an ideal, we want it to be one for which anyone can strive. Nietzsche, on the other hand, does not share this intuition. As far as he is concerned, the ideal of unity is only open to a certain select group of individuals. Once again though, a similar sort of mitigating argument can be given to that which was put forward in the last chapter: whilst it is true that only those people with a fortuitous constitution can ever hope to unify their soul to a high degree, it is also true that there is very little definite knowledge available to any person as to whether they are one of mankind’s few “*strokes of luck*” (GM III: 14) or not. Hence, even if this ideal can only be achieved by a tiny minority, there is no final way of knowing whether or not any given person is in that minority, except by judging to what extent they impose a unity upon the multifarious elements of their soul.

Unity and Diversity

I have now given a fuller account of the nature of Nietzsche’s ideal of unity and how it relates to autonomy. There is, however, one further issue which I have yet to discuss, as it warrants a section all to itself: namely, how Nietzsche incorporates the notion of *diversity* into his ideal of unity. As was seen above, Nietzsche sees the imposition of unity upon the raw materials presented by one’s character to be of vital importance to the achievement of autonomy. Yet whilst unity certainly seems to be something along the lines of a necessary condition for the attainment of the higher degrees of autonomy for Nietzsche, it is not by itself sufficient. Rather, the very “highest” human beings perform an even more difficult feat than merely unifying their character—they unify the greatest number of diverse and even conflicting drives that is possible. This as-

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pect of Nietzsche's thought is put forward particularly clearly in the following passage from *The Will to Power*:¹⁶

In contrast to the animals, man has cultivated an abundance of *contrary* drives and impulses. . . a drive as master, its opposite weakened, refined, as the impulse that provides the stimulus for the activity of the chief drive.

The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, where the plant "man" shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (e.g., in Shakespeare¹⁷), but are controlled.

(WP 966)

This clearly adds something new to Nietzsche's picture. If unity alone was all that was needed to be ranked amongst the highest human beings, then this status might be achieved by people who possessed such unity simply in virtue of having very few different constituent elements to their character, or else by people whose drives were all fairly similar and hence naturally tended to aim towards similar goals or contribute to a recognizable overall style.¹⁸ As this passage shows, however, unity alone is not Nietzsche's full ideal. Rather, the full-blooded version of Nietzsche's ideal demands what might be called unity-in-diversity.¹⁹

Before going on to look at *why* Nietzsche sees unity-in-diversity as being superior to unity *simpliciter*, it will be worth getting a little clearer about exactly what Nietzsche means, as it can intuitively look a little puzzling. In fact, given the stress that is laid on the importance of internal unity for selfhood and autonomy, the demand that the highest individuals should cultivate drives and instincts that "conflict powerfully" can seem totally out of place. To begin with,

¹⁶This passage is from 1884.

¹⁷Nietzsche's choice of Shakespeare here is interesting. For a good treatment of how Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare developed throughout his life see Large (2000).

¹⁸It might be thought that this 'simple' unity was possessed by the masters (as well as possibly the sovereign individual, cf. Chapter II of this work) of the *Genealogy*. I will come back to this thought at the end of this section.

¹⁹The phrase unity-in-diversity is also used by Hurka (2007, p.24). Other commentators use different terms to capture what I take to be a similar idea. Richardson, for example, calls it an ideal of "complex unity" (1996, p.67), and Poellner describes it as "the ideal of 'unity in maximal diversity'" (2009, p.153).

then, I will put these remarks a little more into context. To do this, I will look at two different people who can help throw some light on Nietzsche's ideal of unity-in-diversity: Goethe and Nietzsche himself.

As is well known, Goethe is frequently associated with Nietzsche's ideal of unity, and the passage entitled "Goethe" from *Twilight of the Idols*²⁰ is one of the standard passages to deal with when discussing this issue. And when we look closely at the passage, we see many indications that the "wholeness" that Goethe "disciplined himself" into was one containing many diverse and potentially conflicting elements, rather than one where the similarity of the features involved made his task easier. Below, I have joined together two parts of the passage in question which support this point:

[Goethe] took as much as he could on himself, to himself, in himself. What he wanted was *totality*; he fought against the separation of reason, sensibility, feeling, will. . . Goethe conceived of a strong, highly educated, self-respecting human being, skilled in all things physical and able to keep himself in check, who could dare to allow himself the entire expanse and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom; a person who is tolerant out of strength and not weakness because he knows how to take advantage of things that would destroy an average nature; a person lacking all prohibitions except for *weakness*, whether it is called a vice or a virtue.

(TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 49)

It seems that here then, we clearly have at least a fairly good example of someone who has achieved something along the lines of unity-of diversity. And it is not difficult to see why Nietzsche might choose such an example: Goethe was a poet, author, dramatist, statesman and scientist. If Goethe is a fair example to take, however, we should immediately use it to reflect on the nature of the "conflict" that Nietzsche takes to be constitutive of his ideal type.

There are clearly some senses in which Goethe's notable achievements are in conflict with one another which are of no real interest to us here. They all conflict in that they all make demands on the same persons (i.e. Goethe's) finite amount of time, for example. This is a fairly trivial sense of conflict, and even a

²⁰Section 49 of "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man".

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large collection of extremely similar drives would be conflicting in this uninteresting sense. In the case of Goethe, by contrast, we clearly have a case of conflict at the level of *content*, rather than simply a conflict over limited time. Art and science, for example, are often seen to be in some sort of relation of conflict—if not be everyone, then certainly by the early Nietzsche, given his treatment of these issues.²¹ Similarly, we might see some sort of conflict between the practical man of action that is the statesman and the idealistic dreamer that is the romantic poet. Or again between the disinterested observer of phenomena that is the scientific man and the actor in the world that is the statesman. Hence Nietzsche is clearly not primarily interested in the sort of ‘formal’ style of conflict that would arise between *any* large collection of drives, if his choice of Goethe as an example is anything to go by, but is more interested in there being some sort of conflict or tension between the aims and methods of the various drives.

We should be careful, however, not to go too far with this point. Whilst Goethe may certainly have, in Nietzsche’s opinion at least, successfully unified some pretty diverse tendencies, there is no evidence in this passage to suggest that any of the drives or capacities that he “disciplined” to “wholeness” were actually directly *contradictory*: he did not combine, for example, his playwrighting with a passionate and drawn-out campaign to eradicate theatre wherever he found it, and neither could he have done so successfully.²² Hence, from looking at the Goethe example at least, it seems we should understand Nietzsche notion of conflicting drives as entailing that the drives in question are contrary to one another, rather than directly contradictory.

There is, however, another example available that might allow us to give a somewhat stronger reading of the notion of conflict at work here: that of Nietzsche himself. The main text to draw upon for this example is somewhat longer than that used in connection with Goethe. It is the whole of *Ecce Homo*, the subtitle of which is “How to Become What You Are”. This subtitle is important, as it both implies that Nietzsche considered himself to have achieved the

²¹Something along these lines, for example, seems to be behind the “eternal struggle between the *theoretical* and *tragic views of the world*” (BT 17) that Nietzsche sets forth in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

²²At least, he could not have combined them at the same time. I will return to this point when discussing Nietzsche himself below.

ideal of becoming what one is, at least to a certain extent,²³ and also that there are lessons that can be learned from this account of Nietzsche's development by others who want to become who they are. And when we turn to the text itself, we see that Nietzsche does try to find a place in the narrative of his development for certain aspects of his past that might be seen as being in more direct contradiction with the life-affirming immoralist he took himself to be. His early career as a traditional scholar, his youthful infatuation with Wagner, as well as his early adherence to Schopenhauerian pessimism are all elements of his development that came to be deeply incompatible with his later worldview. Yet, he does not deny or downplay these, or argue that these views were not really his, but rather incorporates them into his narrative by claiming that "even life's *mistakes* have their own meaning and value", as well as by arguing that these "occasional side roads" all helped to prepare "*individual* qualities and virtues" which would one day prove "indispensable as a means to the whole" (EH: "Why I am so Clever", 9). And at other points we get even stronger sounding claims. Early on in the work, for example, he explains his (self-professedly) unique capacity "for switching *perspectives*" by saying "[g]ranting that I am a decadent, I am the opposite as well". This, he tells us, enables him to "look out from the optic of sickness towards *healthier* concepts and values, and again the other way round, to look down from the fullness and self-assurance of the *rich* life into the secret work of the instinct of decadence" (EH: "Why I am so Wise", 1-2). If we take Nietzsche himself as our example instead of (or at least in addition to) Goethe, then, there are grounds for giving an even stronger interpretation to the notion of conflict Nietzsche sees as being involved in the ideal of unity-in-diversity.

We should be careful here once again though, as it must be remembered that the temporal element of Nietzsche's ideal (i.e. the fact that it is not static or achieved at any one moment, but rather takes place over time) is crucial for understanding how Nietzsche incorporated such conflicting tendencies in himself. This is particularly obvious with the relation of his youthful 'follies' to his

²³This is also backed up by many passages in the text itself. EH: "Why I am so Clever", 9, which will be discussed presently, provides an obvious example as Nietzsche explicitly describes, in these very terms, how to become what one is by reference to his own case. See also EH: "Why I am a Destiny", 1-2.

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fully-developed self, but no less true when considering the fact that he was, by his own account, both a decadent and its opposite. As he tells us himself in *Ecce Homo*, he went through long periods of sustained sickness and, at other times, prolonged convalescence. Hence, even here, the sort of unity-in-diversity that allowed Nietzsche to become a master of shifting between perspectives did not involve some sort of schizophrenic ability to be both deeply sick and powerfully healthy *in one instance*. Rather, like a piece of music where the successive sections can express differing and even conflicting moods, the development of Nietzsche's character involved various different stages which enabled him to see life in various *contradictory* ways when compared with each other.²⁴ Therefore, even in this more extreme picture of what it is for an individual to contain "instincts that conflict powerfully" (WP 966) it is still not the case that Nietzsche demands that people simultaneously manifest two powerful, yet directly contradictory drives or impulses.

Aside from the issue of exactly what Nietzsche's ideal of unity-in-diversity entails, which I hope to have just made a little clearer, there is also the issue of *why* Nietzsche sees unity-in-diversity as being superior to unity *simpliciter*. It is this that I shall address in the remainder of this section.

The answer to this question, put simply, is to be found in the notion of power. Nietzsche's preference for the maximum degree of unity-in-diversity is not any sort of arbitrary or merely aesthetic preference, but is rather guided by his belief that people who possess this sort of character will also display the highest degrees of power. And there are, moreover, at least two ways in which Nietzsche links unity-in-diversity and power. As we have already seen, Nietzsche sees power, in his special sense, as being consequent upon the attainment of his ideal of unity-in-diversity. It is because Goethe "disciplined himself to wholeness" while taking "as much as he could on himself, to himself, [and] in himself" that he was able to live according to "the highest of all possible beliefs" (TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 49). And, similarly, it was Nietzsche's

²⁴This point is also made by Nietzsche throughout his 1887 preface to *The Gay Science*. He there says, for example: "I am well aware of the advantages that my erratic health gives me over all burly minds. A philosopher who has passed through many kinds of health, and keeps passing through them again and again, has passed through an equal number of philosophies" (GS P: 3).

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ability to unify both decadent and life-affirming impulses that provide the “reason why a ‘revaluation of values’ is even possible, perhaps to [him] alone” (EH: “Why I am so Wise”, 1).

The power that is consequent upon achieving unity-in-diversity, however, is only half the story. This is because, in addition to this, power is also a *precondition* of attaining this ideal. A great deal of power is already required in order to control a collection of powerful and diverse instincts, and hence the individual who is able to achieve any reasonable degree of unity-in-diversity will already, irrespective of their ‘outward’ accomplishments, have demonstrated that they possess a high degree of power and are therefore, by that very token, well on their way to attaining autonomy. This is shown clearly in a section of *Twilight of the Idols* called “My Idea of Freedom”:

Sometimes the value of a thing is not what you get with it but what you pay for it,—what it *costs*. . . The free human being is a *warrior*.—How is freedom measured in individuals and in peoples? It is measured by the resistance that needs to be overcome, by the effort that it costs to stay on *top*. Look for the highest type of free human beings where the highest resistance is constantly being overcome: five paces away from tyranny, right on the threshold, where servitude is danger. This is true psychologically, if you understand “tyrant” to mean the merciless and terrible instincts that provoke the maximal amount of authority and discipline against themselves

(II: “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, 38)

As this passage demonstrates, it is not only the case that an individual must possess a unified collection of the most conflicting possible drives in order to express the maximum degree of power possible outwardly. It is also the case that unifying such a diverse collection of drives is itself a sign of the power of the individual question. Hence, attaining a high degree of unity-in-diversity is both a cause of, and in itself a sign of, a high degree of Nietzsche’s special sense of power being present in the person at hand.

This double relationship with power is clearly the main driving force in Nietzsche’s commitment to the ideal of unity-in-diversity. Aside from this, however, it is also illuminating to look at this aspect of Nietzsche’s through the lens of his conception of the development of European man. Here, I borrow heavily

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from Richardson's excellent treatment of these issues, which I also discussed in Chapter 2. According to the picture Richardson gives, to recap briefly, modern man has thus far gone through two main stages since emerging from the morality of custom. The first such stage is represented by the dominance of the master. The master possesses roughly what I have called unity *simpliciter*, as a sort of instinctive animal health, but largely because he only possess a relatively simple collection of drives which are all fairly brutish and similar. The second stage, which is ushered in by the slave revolt in morals, brings about the dominance of, somewhat unsurprisingly, the slave.²⁵ The slave is, in many ways, the mirror image of the master: instead of a relatively simple yet coherent set of drives, he possesses an abundance of diverse and conflicting drives, yet which fight vehemently against each other. Put extremely briefly, the master is unified but simple, whereas the slave is complex yet fragmented. The third stage of this development, then, which is yet to come and which Nietzsche hopes to bring about through his writings, occurs when the best qualities of the two previous stages are united in a new type, which Richardson labels the "overman". This type possess both the complexity of the slave, along with the "wholeness" (1996, p.69) of the master.

This picture of the development of modern European man clearly ties in with the notion of unity-in-diversity that has been under discussion: the "overman" who unites the best qualities of both the master and slave types is simply identical with the man who has attained Nietzsche's ideal of unity-in-diversity to a high degree. Moreover, as Richardson also points out,²⁶ this story also gives us an insight into why Nietzsche thinks that the present state of European man provides an excellent opportunity for the achievement of just such an ideal. Modern man, in Nietzsche's opinion, has already got the vast array of conflicting drives that are necessary for the higher type he imagines. All that is needed are individuals capable of uniting them all into some sort of whole, instead of merely suffering from their demands as if they were an unruly and uncontrollable mob. Or, to take Nietzsche's own words from *Beyond Good and*

²⁵Although, technically speaking, the type of person that Richardson describes under the heading of "The slave" (1996, p.57) is actually modern man as the inheritor of the slave revolt, rather than the original slaves who actually brought about the revolt.

²⁶See Richardson (1996, p.66).

Evil:

In an age of disintegration where the races are mixed together, a person will have the legacy of multiple lineages in his body, which means conflicting (and often not merely conflicting) drives and value standards that fight with each other and rarely leave each other alone. A man like this, of late cultures and refracted lights, will typically be a weaker person: his most basic desire is for an end to the war that he *is*. . . But if conflict and war affect such a nature as one *more* stimulus and goad to life—, and if genuine proficiency and finesse in waging war with himself (which is to say: the ability to control and outwit himself) are inherited and cultivated along with his most powerful and irreconcilable drives, then what emerge are those amazing, incomprehensible, and unthinkable ones, those human riddles destined for victory and for seduction

(BGE 200)

Final Questions

We now have a clearer picture of what Nietzsche's idea of unity amounts to, and why it is linked to his idea of autonomy. When an individual has unified their character, their various drives and affects all co-operate towards shared ends, rather than each drive trying to thwart and obstruct the activities of all others in an attempt to put itself in control. This co-operative behaviour from the various drives and affects, fairly obviously, allows the individual in question to act far more effectively, and the ability to act effectively is almost synonymous with autonomy in Nietzsche's eyes. Moreover, given that this unification of the drives is something that must be worked on over time, it also means that anyone who goes some way towards achieving this goal will not be a slave "to the mood and desire of the moment" (GM II: 3) but will have "his own, independent, enduring will" (GM II: 2).

We have also seen how Nietzsche builds the idea of diversity into his notion of unity, essentially believing that individuals who manage to unify the most diverse collections of drives will have characters capable of greater expressions of power, and by extension even higher degrees of autonomy. In addition to this, we have seen that modern individuals, due to their richer inner lives, as well as due to supposed facts about the interbreeding of various different races,

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have a unique opportunity for the creation of such diverse-yet-unified characters from the fact that they contain “conflicting (and often not merely conflicting) drives and value standards that fight with each other and rarely leave each other alone” (BGE 200).

To conclude, I want to look at a fairly natural worry that might be had about treating such a conception of unity as an evaluative standard—namely, that it is a purely *formal* conception. The point of this worry is that Nietzsche's notion of unity seems to be totally focused on the power relations between people's various drives and affects, and not at all concerned about what the drives and affects are drives and affects *towards*. Put another way, Nietzsche's attention seems to be entirely preoccupied with the question of the *effectiveness* of a person's will, whilst he has little or no interest in what it is that they actually are willing. As we saw Nietzsche himself say earlier: “whether the taste [according to which one formed one's character] was good or bad means less than one may think; it's enough that it was one taste!” (GS 290).

The point of this worry can be brought out even more clearly by considering the following two questions: 1) Could someone achieve the Nietzschean ideal of unity and still be a morally reprehensible individual? and 2) Could someone achieve the Nietzschean ideal of unity and still be fundamentally dull or uninteresting? In the remainder of this chapter, I will treat these two questions in turn.

1) Could someone achieve the Nietzschean ideal of unity and still be a morally reprehensible individual?

One immediate concern that might arise from the formal nature of Nietzsche's notion of unity is the possibility of someone fulfilling it to a high degree whilst still being a morally reprehensible person. As was mentioned above, Nietzsche does not seem to rule out in principle any particular drives or types of drives from being forged into the unity of a person's character. In fact, his insistence on the claim that more diversity is better seems to, if anything, go directly against the idea of excluding certain types of drive in principle. Given this, there seems to be nothing that rules out a person having a unified character composed largely of drives of which most people would naturally disapprove: drives to steal, cheat, manipulate, hurt and deceive. Provided all these drives

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stood in the right relationship to each other, all subservient to one ‘evil’ master drive perhaps, this person would presumably meet with Nietzsche’s approval.

This argument, I take it, is meant to point out the counter-intuitive implications of this notion of unity: Nietzsche’s evaluative standard cannot be correct if it implies that we should be lauding people who we intuitively believe that we should be condemning. This, however, obviously ignores the extent to which Nietzsche intends his work to be a challenge to our current intuitions about who deserves our respect and admiration, as well as who deserves our contempt and disapproval. As the self-proclaimed “first *immoralist*” (EH: “Why I am a Destiny”, 2), a large part of Nietzsche’s project involves trying to persuade his readers that those who are currently considered ‘the good men’ are akin to tame, domesticated house-animals, and as such are more worthy of disgust than of admiration. And, as a flipside to this, he also tries to show his readers that whilst there may be something terrifying about the people we currently label ‘evil’, these are also often the strongest specimens of mankind. Hence the following question, which was also noted in Chapter II, that Nietzsche poses to his readers in the *Genealogy*:

We may be quite justified in retaining our fear of the blond beast at the centre of every noble race and remain on our guard: but who would not, a hundred times over, prefer to fear if he can admire at the same time, rather than *not* fear, but thereby permanently retain the disgusting spectacle of the failed, the stunted, the wasted away and the poisoned?

(GM I: 11)

In the interests of fairness, however, it must be ensured that this point is not overstated. As any careful reader of Nietzsche will know, he is not some sort of bloodthirsty monster who straightforwardly idolises the cruel, unthinking and violent amongst mankind, and many points could be made that support this fact. One could point to his basic *ambivalence* towards the “blond beast at the centre of every noble race”, which combines an admiration for their healthy and active way of life with a disdain for their simplicity and stupidity. Or, one could point to the fact that he tends to save his most powerful eulogies for literary and artistic figures like Schopenhauer and Goethe, rather than for

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cruel and violent tyrannisers of men. Or, again, one could point to the fact that his frequent praising of hardness and cruelty are, at least in the vast majority of cases, concerned with hardness and cruelty towards one's self rather than towards others.

Whatever apologetics we choose to employ in Nietzsche's defence, however, the main point remains the same: the fact that Nietzsche's evaluative standard of unity does not necessarily cohere with our current moral intuitions could be just as easily used by Nietzsche as a criticism of our current moral intuitions as it could be used to try and demonstrate the implausibility of Nietzsche's theory. Therefore, it would be begging a very large question—in fact, possibly the central one of Nietzsche's later years, relating to the value of our current moral values—to assume that this criticism has any real force without significant further argument.

2) *Could someone achieve the Nietzschean ideal of unity and still be fundamentally dull or uninteresting?*

Aside from any questions about the possible moral status of someone who achieved the Nietzschean ideal of unity, there is also a question as to whether such a person might attain this ideal to a relatively high degree yet be basically dull or uninteresting. Initially, this might seem like a far less significant question, as we ordinarily take someone's moral worth to be of far more importance than any questions about how interesting they are. Given what was said in response to the previous question, however, it is now obvious that Nietzsche cannot wholly share this view. In fact, it might even seem fair to say that a large part of Nietzsche's problem with the "tame and civilized... *household pet*" (GM I: 11) that is the modern European individual is basically a sort of aesthetic revulsion at just how uninteresting such a type of man is. This is shown well by the following famous passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

Beware! The time approaches when human beings will no longer give birth to a dancing star. Beware! The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself.

Behold! I show you *the last human being*.

"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?"—thus asks the last human being, blinking.

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Then the earth has become small, and on it hops the last human being, who makes everything small. His kind is ineradicable, like the flea beetle; the last human being lives longest.

“We have invented happiness”—say the last human beings, blinking.

They abandoned the regions where it is hard to live: for one needs warmth. One still loves one’s neighbour and rubs up against him: for one needs warmth.

...

One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one sees to it that the entertainment is not a strain.

One no longer becomes poor and rich: both are too burdensome. Who wants to rule anymore? Who wants to obey anymore? Both are too burdensome.

No shepherd and one herd! Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the insane asylum.

(Z: “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, 5)

Nietzsche’s attack in this passage is directed at those people, who he takes to be very common in his day, who complacently assume that the whole purpose of history has been to breed “the ultra-modern, humble moral weakling who ‘no longer bites’” (GM P: 7) and that no higher goal could possibly be conceived for mankind. He highlights a number of unattractive features of such individuals: self-satisfaction, lack of independence, squeamishness in the face of suffering or hardship, desire to conform and so on. Of all the impressions one gets of the “*last human being*” from this passage, however, one of the most abiding is of just how *unimpressive* he is.

In light of this, it might well be a worry for Nietzsche if his idea of unity is perfectly compatible with its being achieved by such unimpressive individuals as this, or indeed of any other kind. This argument is, in many ways, like the previous argument (discussed as the first question). The difference, however, is that instead of using our standard moral intuitions to raise doubts about Nietzsche’s theory, this argument attempts to draw more upon what we might reasonably take Nietzsche’s intuitions to be on the question of who is to be admired and who is to be seen as worthy of contempt. Given that Nietzsche seems to reserve some of his most venomous contempt for those who are basically unimpressive or uninteresting (or incapable of arousing fear, as we might also put it), there is

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certainly a genuine question about whether such people might not be capable of achieving unity in Nietzsche's specialized sense.

As Nietzsche's conception of unity is purely formal, there is nothing to immediately rule out people who unify a collection of drives that it seems Nietzsche would basically disapprove of: drives towards safety, towards the avoidance of pain, towards mechanical activity, towards effeminacy and softness and so on. Moreover, parallel with the example used in connection with the previous question, it is not too difficult to imagine all these drives standing in an appropriate relation to each other—all subservient to one master conforming-to-the-herd drive or something similar.

There are, however, certain responses it seems Nietzsche could make to this sort of worry. Perhaps the most natural response would be to point to the notion of *diversity* that Nietzsche builds into his thinking on unity. As was discussed in the previous section, unity amongst one's various drives and affects alone is not the whole of Nietzsche's ideal for human beings. Instead, his ideal individual is one who creates a unified character from a large range of diverse and conflicting (or at least potentially conflicting) tendencies, as he believed happened with one of his favourite examples, that of Goethe.²⁷ Given this, it might be possible that anyone who unifies enough such conflicting drives is bound to be interesting or impressive by that token alone.

Whether this response is satisfactory or not raises further questions that are related to some of the issues discussed in the previous section. There I argued that Nietzsche's notion of conflicting drives can presumably only mean drives that are contrary to one another in some sense, rather than directly contradictory. If this is the case, then it may well still seem possible to imagine a person who unites enough contrary yet uninteresting drives into a coherent and unified character: a drive to fastidious cleanliness alongside a drive to know every last available detail about the life of Aristotle, with further drives to play ping pong and become fluent in Spanish, all combined with a large number of unrelated further drives which, while in no way objectionable or necessarily uninteresting in themselves, do not exactly add up to anything like our normal picture of

²⁷See TI: "Expeditions of an Untimely Man", 49. This example was also discussed in the previous section.

a great individual in anything like the grand-historic sense.

Perhaps it could be argued that this collection of drives is simply still not conflicting enough, and that once the required degree of conflict between drives has been achieved the result will inevitably be an individual worthy of respect and admiration. As Nietzsche never goes into any great detail on questions such as this, however, this type of argument might be seen to come worryingly close to begging the question: in other words, to the unsupported insistence that *only* interesting individuals be recognized as displaying the requisite degree of unity-in-diversity, and that all unity-in-diversity produces an interesting individual.

These sorts of questions need not detain us for too long, however, as I think there is a slightly more satisfactory answer to this issue available than merely pointing to the notion of diversity that Nietzsche builds into his concept of unity. This answer involves recognizing that, whilst Nietzsche does use his notion of unity as a standard of evaluation, it is not his main or primary standard. The main standard is, of course, power.

As probably goes without saying, any individual who achieved a great deal of power (in Nietzsche's specific sense) could not fail to be interesting, at least by Nietzsche's lights, and very probably by a more common sense understanding of the notion of 'interesting'. Therefore, there is no danger of an unimpressive individual being capable of meeting the requirements of this more prominent standard of evaluation. This obviously does not, however, provide a direct answer to the question currently being considered: we may well be able to accept that an individual who achieves a high degree of power, by overcoming great resistances in the pursuit of worthwhile goals, will be interesting, but this still does not provide an answer to whether someone could attain the Nietzschean ideal of unity whilst still being, for lack of a better word, dull. It does present us with a new question though, namely about the relation between power and unity.

This new question, as far as I can see, has two different possible answers. The first is that unity is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of achieving the higher degrees of power. If this is the view that we attribute to Nietzsche, then anybody who performs great deeds or creates great works will necessarily possess a high level of unity in their character, but not everybody who attains to

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a unified character will therefore produce impressive works or deeds. The second option, by contrast, would be to see Nietzsche as endorsing something akin to the belief that great achievements are the only accurate or reliable *evidence* that a person has truly attained to his ideal of unity, therefore ensuring that the categories of 'great individuals' and 'individuals who have unified a diverse collection of conflicting drives' are necessarily co-extensive.

Each of these two options will yield a different answer to the overall question currently being considered, namely whether an individual can achieve the Nietzschean ideal of unity whilst still remaining uninteresting or unimpressive. If the first option is chosen, this will indeed be possible, although mitigated by the thought that such an individual will still not have come far along Nietzsche's primary standard of evaluation, that of the degree of power displayed. If the second option is chosen, on the other hand, great deeds, such as the creation of great works, the founding of mighty nations, or indeed effecting massive changes in values, will be the only possible evidence of having attained to the ideal of unity, hence it will not be possible to attribute such an achievement to uninteresting individuals.

There is little in terms of textual evidence to help us choose between these two interpretations. On the one side, the fact that one of most famous passages concerning unity, i.e. the passage from *Twilight of the Idols* discussed a couple of times already (TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 49), links this notion so strongly to Goethe, a figure Nietzsche would undoubtedly class as a great individual, could be seen as supporting the second option.

The first option, on the other hand, would cohere more naturally with a reading of Nietzsche given by Richardson, and also supported by some of the conclusions I reached in Chapter II of this thesis.²⁸ In order to show why this is so, I will briefly recap some of the content of this reading. This interpretation of Nietzsche's thinking, particularly as it presents itself in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the *Genealogy*, involves splitting the development of mankind (or at least European man) into three stages. In the first such phase, represented by the dominance of noble morality, mankind (or at least a certain class of men, the nobles) displayed a high degree of unity in their character, but only amongst a

²⁸It was also discussed more recently on pages 169–171.

relatively small and fairly naturally coherent set of drives. Then, during the second phase, which is marked out by the dominance of slavish morality, mankind started to possess a far greater number of drives, with much more diversity between them. However, this new diversity was also combined with far less internal unity, hence turning man into “*the sick animal*” (GM III: 13). Then finally, in the third phase, which is yet to come and which Nietzsche hopes to help bring about through his writings, mankind is able to unite the virtues of both of these phases—combining the unity of character associated with the noble man with the far more interesting and eclectic range of drives associated with his slavish counterpart.²⁹

Now, it might be argued that the very possibility of such a reading rests upon severing the achievement of unity from its being displayed in great deeds as the whole class of nobles, who possess a reasonable degree of unity on this reading, cannot plausibly all be taken to have distinguished themselves through remarkable achievements. Perhaps this is still not entirely correct as the ancient nobles, due to the relative simplicity and sparseness in number of their drives, have only attained to unity and not to the full-blown unity-in-diversity that is Nietzsche’s true ideal. Even if this is so, however, the point might still be pushed: after all, if Nietzsche hopes that a fair number of future individuals will achieve such unity-in-diversity, it might well seem unreasonable for him to assume that all such people will, as a result of this fact, bring forth noteworthy deeds and achievements.

In the final analysis, however, I think it would be stretching the truth to say that the textual evidence points conclusively to either of these two interpretations. And similar sentiments could be expressed when considering the different philosophical merits of these two approaches. Somewhat unsurprisingly, they have complementary advantages and failings. The view that the only reliable evidence that someone has achieved Nietzsche’s unity-in-diversity ideal is great works or deeds, for example, seems to have one major benefit. This lies in the way that it treats drives. Given all Nietzsche’s talk of unity and rank-ordering of drives, it can often be tempting to slip into a kind of visual metaphor in relation to drives—to imagine that they are somehow discreet items, and that

²⁹For Richardson’s more detailed version of this story, see Richardson (1996, p.52-72).

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we possess a way of identifying them independently of their actual expressions through action. As Nietzsche himself recognizes, however, this is not the case.³⁰ Rather, the only real evidence we have in respect to nature and coherence of a person's drives is their observable behaviour.³¹ This view of the relationship between unity-in-diversity and evidence in the form of great deeds takes this fact into account in a far more satisfactory fashion than the view which sees unity-in-diversity as only necessary, but not sufficient for the achievement of the higher degrees of power.

With this advantage, however, come certain disadvantages. For one thing, it highly restricts the range of possible character types in Nietzsche's repertoire, almost to the extent that it would seem to only contain grand-historical individuals and those with disordered psyches. And, to go along with this, it might seem to tie the state of coherence amongst a person's drives directly to a sort of social recognition of the merit of their achievements, when it might plausibly be argued that these two things could be separated at least to a higher degree than this interpretation would seem to allow. If we take the view that unity-in-diversity can also be displayed by others than those who have produced great works and deeds, however, these concerns will be nowhere near as pressing. And finally, seeing remarkable works and actions as the only evidence of internal unity might make this ideal seem so unattainable as to scare many people off trying to achieve it, although it is not immediately obvious whether Nietzsche himself would count this as an advantage or a disadvantage.

In the final analysis, then, I do not think that there is much to enable us to choose between these two competing readings. The one thing that can be said with certainty, however, is that whichever one is opted for will bring with it certain interpretive advantages, but also a related set of costs that the alternative

³⁰Take, for example, the following statement from *Daybreak*: "However far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of *drives* which constitute his being. He can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counterplay among one another, and above all the laws of their *nutriment* remain wholly unknown to him" (D 119).

³¹I include under the idea of observable behaviour here the sort of thing, such as inner thoughts and feelings, that can only be observed by the individual through introspection, as these too only reveal consequences of the relations between a person's drives and never some sort of direct view of discrete entities which are the drives themselves.

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reading would be better equipped to avoid.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Throughout the main chapters of this thesis, I have tried to reconstruct a plausible version of what I have been calling Nietzsche's autonomy ideal—his ideal of the post-moral autonomous individual who is, or at least should be, possible after the destruction of Judaeo-Christian morality for which Nietzsche takes himself to be (at least partly) responsible. According to the interpretation I have given, Nietzsche measures the degree of an individual's autonomy by the power of their will in relation to other wills, as well as by their ability to extend their will over long periods of time. I have also looked at the methods that Nietzsche proposes as being necessary to the attainment of this goal: the individual in question must impose a unity on the raw materials provided by their natural self, either intentionally or 'instinctively', through the discipline of a self-imposed and personalized ethic.

This task has, however, most certainly been one of active reconstruction rather than mere elucidation. As is well known, Nietzsche is not a systematic philosopher,¹ and there is certainly at least some truth in Bernard Williams' famous claim that Nietzsche's work "is booby-trapped not only against recovering theory from it, but, in many cases against any systematic exegesis that assimilates it to theory" (1995b, p. 66). Hence, in reconstructing as I have done, I have inevitably had to ignore or downplay certain elements of Nietzsche's thinking that another, alternative reading with differing interpretive aims might

¹He himself even goes so far as to say: "I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI: "Maxims and Arrows", 26).

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have been able to give more prominence to. In this conclusion, I would like to go some way towards compensating for this fact by highlighting one particular collection of ideas whose omission might seem surprising in a thesis on a Nietzschean ideal: namely, *amor fati*, the eternal return, and the affirmation of life.

These three elements of Nietzsche's thought have not been chosen at random. Rather, they are all closely related to each other. Moreover, they constitute the core concepts of what, I will suggest, might potentially be seen as another Nietzschean ideal, different from the ideal of autonomy. It is the relationship between this second ideal, which might fairly be called the affirmation ideal, and Nietzsche's autonomy ideal which I want to examine briefly in this conclusion.

Before going on to compare these two strands of Nietzsche's thought, however, it will be worth making some preliminary remarks to prevent a possible misconception. What I do not want to claim here is that Nietzsche himself distinguished in any particularly obvious way between these two ideals. They do not come from different periods of his philosophical development, and the passages which elucidate them do not primarily come from different books. In fact, there are even certain passages which one might expect to find discussed in connection with both of these ideals.² Therefore the distinction between these two ideals is something that I am taking to Nietzsche's work in order to highlight some of the tensions between his various positive recommendations for mankind, rather than something which can be straightforwardly read off from these works themselves.

To begin with, I will say a bit about what I take Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation to involve. The account I give here will have to be, inevitably, slightly brief and schematic. As with the ideal of autonomy that I have been discussing up to this point, Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation is complex and open to numerous different interpretations, and could easily be the subject of a whole thesis by

²TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 49 is the most obvious example of a passage that one would expect to see mentioned in relation to both of these aspects of Nietzsche's thought. In addition to this, it is worth noting that GS 290 closes by saying that the "one thing [that] is needful" (which is also the title of the passage) is that "a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself"—a thought that might seem to link it to Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation.

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itself. I will therefore be assuming a certain amount of pre-existing knowledge on the part of the reader on the general nature of these issues.

The main recommendation of Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation, as I take it, is that one should aim to be able to affirm one's life as a whole: that one should 'say yes' to the entirety of one's life, down to its smallest detail and without leaving anything out. In other words, one should not merely accept, but actually love or desire to repeat the whole course of one's life exactly as it currently is and has been, including the parts of it which were experienced as negative or painful as much as the parts that were experienced as positive and enjoyable.

This primary goal of Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation gives sense to the two connected ideas mentioned above. Firstly, there is the attitude of *amor fati*: cultivating this attitude in one's self, and hence coming to love that which is necessary, is a crucial part of coming to love one's life as a whole. This is because, on Nietzsche's view, there will inevitably be a great many features of a person's life that cannot be altered. Such features would naturally seem to include at least facts about the person in question's past, and possibly also facts about the "brick wall of spiritual *fatum*" (BGE 231) that constitutes the unalterable aspects of their character. If a person cannot come to love such necessities and see them as beautiful, they will never be capable of affirming their life as a whole.

The second major idea which is intimately connected to this ideal of affirmation is that which Nietzsche calls the "basic idea" of *Zarathustra* and dubs as "the highest possible formula of affirmation" (EH: "Why I Write Such Good Books", Z I): the notion of the eternal return. This notion first crops up at the end of Book Four of *The Gay Science* (GS 341), where it is presented as a thought experiment, the basic question of which is: how would you react if you found out (or rather, if "a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you") that you were going to live your current life, down to the very smallest detail, over and over an infinite number of times? This thought experiment is then meant to act as the ultimate test of life-affirmation. If a person reacts joyously to the discovery that they will have to live the exact course of their life "once again and innumerable times again", then they clearly affirm their life to an extremely high degree. If, on the other hand, they throw themselves to the

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ground, gnash their teeth and curse this news, then they obviously do not affirm their life to anywhere near the extent that Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation requires.

Described so briefly, there are many questions left unanswered about Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation: is the eternal return merely a thought experiment, or did Nietzsche seriously propose it as a cosmological hypothesis? What is the exact relation between the eternal return as a cosmological hypothesis and as test of affirmation? Is the eternal return even successful merely as a test of affirmation? Is it conceptually and psychologically possible, or even desirable, that one affirm literally *everything* about one's life? Should the negative aspects of one's life be affirmed instrumentally (i.e. for the role they played in making one who one is today) or for what they are in themselves? Do we need to merely affirm our own lives, or is the ultimate goal of this ideal for the individual who attains to it to affirm the whole history of the world? As interesting as these questions are, however, I will have to leave them aside here. Instead, the question I want to focus on is: how well does this ideal of affirmation cohere with the ideal of autonomy that I have been describing throughout this thesis.

The reason why I raise this question is, of course, because I think that we can detect at least a *prima facie* tension between these views, if not a tension that goes even deeper into the positive recommendations Nietzsche makes to his readers. And this tension can be brought out most clearly by considering the attitudes required of their adherents by these two ideals towards themselves and their lives. As stated above, the main aim (or at least a major aim) of the ideal of affirmation is to say yes to oneself and one's past—to love these things as they are and to not want them to be any different. Now let us listen to Nietzsche's account of individuals "who have *become free*":

How is freedom measured in individuals and in peoples? It is measured by the resistance that needs to be overcome, by the effort that it costs to stay on *top*. Look for the highest type of free human beings where the highest resistance is constantly being overcome: five paces away from tyranny, right on the threshold, where servitude is danger. This is true psychologically, if you understand "tyrant" to mean the merciless and terrible instincts that provoke the maximal amount of authority and discipline against themselves

(TI: "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man", 38)

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Here we come back to one of the central Nietzschean ideas elaborated in this thesis: that individuals who achieve the highest degrees of autonomy do so through the constant struggle to impose some sort of stylistic unity upon the largest numbers of diverse and conflicting drives possible. Moreover, the greater this struggle is the greater the degree of autonomy that will result from it.

Given the nature of these two positions then, the issue now becomes their compatibility. On the one hand, Nietzsche recommends that a person should try and whole-heartedly affirm everything about themselves and their life exactly as it is and has been.³ On the other, he seems to suggest that autonomy requires treating certain aspects of one's nature as needing "to be molded, broken, forged, torn, burnt, seared and purified" (BGE 225)—an attitude which at least on the surface seems to entail wanting certain features of one's character and life to be different from how they presently are.

There are several ways in which one might deal with this seeming incompatibility without attributing outright inconsistency to Nietzsche. One way would be to simply admit that there is a certain amount of conflict between these two threads of Nietzsche's thought whilst maintaining that the presence of this conflict can be adequately explained. Perhaps Nietzsche is operating here according to the idea that no single ideal will suit all people. These two ideals would then be seen as catering to different markets, so to speak, and any conflict between them would be a function of the differences between the types of person that they are aimed at. Or else one might argue that, given the difficulty of Nietzsche's task (i.e. to provide some sort of new ideal for the post-moral age), he is quite justified in trying out numerous different and not altogether compatible ideas. This sort of approach would be true enough to the complex and unsystematic nature of Nietzsche's works, but might leave some readers feeling that justice has not been done to a sort of deep consistency they feel to be present in Nietzsche's writings—to the fact that his ideas, despite their unsystematic presentation, are "all related and [refer] to one another" as "a testimonial to one will, one health, one earth, one sun" (GM P: 2).

³This tension can also be seen in how close this description comes to overlapping with Nietzsche's portrayal of "*the last human being*" who "can no longer have contempt for himself" (Z: "Zarathustra's Prologue", 5).

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Another approach that might be taken, which is in many ways directly opposed to the first approach mentioned above, would be to claim that we are not dealing with two different ideals at all here, but rather with the two inseparable halves of a single more complex ideal. The most plausible version of this strategy, which would be somewhat reminiscent of Nehamas' argument in *Life as Literature*, would be to use the notion of *unity* as the point that connects these two strands of Nietzsche's thought. As was discussed at length during the course of this thesis, imposing a sort of stylistic unity upon one's drives and one's life is a key condition of becoming autonomous, on Nietzsche's view. And, it might plausibly be argued, imposing this sort of stylistic unity is also a crucial part of Nietzsche's thinking on life-affirmation, as it is only when *every* part of a person's existence makes an indispensable contribution to the stylistic unity that is their whole life that they can affirm everything about themselves and their past down to the smallest detail. Given this link through the notion of unity, therefore, it would certainly be possible to maintain that autonomy and life-affirmation go hand in hand for Nietzsche, and that one cannot experience an increase in one's degree of either of these two qualities without simultaneously experiencing an identical increase in the other.

Seeing Nietzsche's various pronouncements on autonomy and life-affirmation as being linked in this way is, to my mind, by far the most ambitious of the strategies one might take in thinking about the relationship between these two aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy. At the most basic level, the advantages and disadvantages of this reading are the exact opposite of those discussed in connection with the first approach. On the plus side, it allows us to attribute a high degree of coherence to the majority of the positive recommendations that Nietzsche makes in his writings. On the other hand, however, such a reading seems to be motivated by the particularly un-Nietzschean assumption that a superior interpretation of Nietzsche's thought would be one which succeeded in combining all of his various positive suggestions into one over-arching super-ideal which should be aspired to by all of Nietzsche's followers.

Even beyond these basic points, however, the ambitious nature of this approach leads to some further difficult questions. If the argument I have made throughout this thesis is anywhere near correct, Nietzsche does not see auton-

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omy as being, or directly implying, any particular attitude towards one's own life. Rather, it is something more along the lines of the power of one's will, measured by both its relation to other wills and its capacity to extend itself through time. Life-affirmation, by contrast, most certainly *is* an attitude towards one's own life—and a highly positive one at that. If we try to directly equate these two notions, therefore, the question which immediately arises is: why should we think that these two things (i.e. the strength of one's will and one's degree of satisfaction with one's self and one's life) can never come apart? Why can someone with a strong will not also be dissatisfied with large stretches of their own personal history? And why can't someone with a weak will not affirm their life to a relatively high degree merely through possessing fairly low standards? Any reading which wants to make such a direct link between autonomy and life-affirmation will have to find some sort of answers to these questions.

Between these two opposed ways of treating the relationship between autonomy and affirmation in Nietzsche's thought, other paths could be found. One could, for example, see these two ideals as being complementary to each other in some sense: when faced with those aspects of their life and character that can be changed, the best reaction a person can have is to impose discipline and form upon them, and when faced with those elements of their existence which cannot be altered, it is better to adopt an attitude of unreserved affirmation towards them. Any inconsistencies between these two threads in Nietzsche's thought would then be explained by the fact that they are intended to be directed towards different parts of the person in question's life—towards the 'contingent' aspects on one hand and the 'necessary' aspects on the other.

This sort of reading is neat enough, and provides a coherent way of seeing how these two ideals might fit together in a single individual's life. Its main problem, however, is its adequacy to the texts. Whilst it would fit well with some of the relevant passages (particularly with those that focus on *amor fati*), it would be difficult to make it square with some of Nietzsche's more full-blooded passages on life-affirmation. In these sorts of passages, Nietzsche claims that we should affirm *every* aspect of our existence down to the smallest detail—hence leaving little room for any sort of important distinction between certain aspects of one's life which are necessary and others which are contingent, and

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thereby reintroducing the problem of the consistency between these two lines of Nietzsche's thought.

A final option worth considering is that these two ideals are compatible but not co-extensive. If this were the case, it would be possible for an individual to meet the requirements of both of these ideals to a high standard simultaneously,⁴ but also equally possible for a person to achieve either one of these ideals independently of the other. This option would have the beneficial feature of increasing the roster of Nietzsche's ideal figures, as well as allowing for some interesting differences amongst the reasons why they draw his admiration: some do so for the strength of will they exercise in overcoming both inner and outer resistances, and others do so because of their capacity to affirm their lives for exactly what they are, the good and the bad elements both included. Some rarer individuals still draw his admiration for their ability to perform both of these difficult aims at once. For some, however, this sort of solution may still seem to be too piecemeal. People of this persuasion may point to Nietzsche's love of the Homeric Greeks in this context, as he often paints them as people who both possessed a strong will (prior to the degeneration of their instincts around the time of Socrates) and managed to affirm life despite its painful and destructive aspects.⁵

There is no obvious knock-down argument in favour of any of these positions. And if we turn to Nietzsche's works themselves, statements could inevitably be found in support of each of them. This is perhaps understandable given the nature of Nietzsche's project as he conceives it. Nietzsche is avowedly not trying to give a systematic and fully consistent presentation of a single ideal for the future of humanity, but is rather making various attempts to strike out on the "open sea" (GS 343) that he believes to be opening up due to the downfall of the Christian-moral worldview. Moreover, given that he believes that very few people have ever attempted to live according to such ideals before, there is not exactly a wealth of what we might call empirical evidence for him to work

⁴With Goethe as an obvious example springing to mind here.

⁵Soll gives a very interesting treatment of Nietzsche's shifting conception of the "tragic view of life" (1988, p.129) that allowed the Greeks to deal with the suffering inherent in life in an alternative and superior fashion to the "pessimism of weakness" (1988, p.115) that Nietzsche associates primarily with Schopenhauer.

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from. Whatever the relation between these two aspects of Nietzsche's thought, however, one thing remains clear: that a large part of Nietzsche's project was to promote the existence of the autonomous post-moral man—of the untimely individual who stands apart from the crowd, is opposed to the spirit of the age, and is the author of their own values and ultimately of their own self.

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