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Article

Why Naturalism? Translating *Homo Natura* Back into Nietzsche's Text

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ABSTRACT

This article questions a common reading of Section 230 of *Beyond Good and Evil* as containing a canonical statement of Nietzsche's naturalism. The section cannot be read simply as the programmatic statement of an investigative task, and is relatively vague as to its nature. Nietzsche's aim is aporetic. He presents the naturalist task as involving mental self-cruelty and a struggle with unconscious vanity, suggesting that thinkers have found no way to justify why they choose this task, unless they invoke self-descriptions which are false and belong to a metaphysical conception of truth and inquiry that naturalism must resist. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche revisits this theme and announces his task as that of calling into question these justifications of naturalist inquiry.

1. HOMO NATURA

In a much-discussed passage in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of an investigative task (we may assume it is his own) in which

> the terrible basic text *homo natura* must be recognized again. . . . Translating the human back into nature; becoming master of the many vain and fanciful interpretations and incidental meanings that have been scribbled and painted over that eternal basic text *homo natura* so far. . . .—This may be a strange and insane task, but it is a *task*—who would deny it? (BGE 230, translation modified)[1]

The Latin phrase *homo natura* is probably best read as 'the natural human', or 'the human as nature'. This is the only occurrence of the phrase in Nietzsche's published works, and the passage is enigmatic. For example, why is the task of recognizing *homo natura* a 'strange' and 'insane' one, or at least a 'crazy' one?[2] Why does Nietzsche refer to *homo natura* as a text? Why is the text 'eternal' (*ewig*)? Why is it 'terrible' (*schrecklich*)?[3]

For Nietzsche, the erstwhile philologist, a text here is something to which interpretations may be applied, but which holds its identity independently of them. As classical scholars will know, there is always a question as to what is the original text and what is a later addition or previous

interpretation that has obscured and corrupted the original. To take a random example, in his early painstaking work on the poet Theognis, Nietzsche concluded that "[w]hat we now possess under the name 'Theognis' is not his original composition, but a later-arranged combination of redundant phrasings, awkward assemblages, and even intrusions from other poets" (Jensen 2014, 104). Nietzsche calls the *homo natura* that he wishes to investigate a *Grundtext*, a basic or fundamental text, implying that, like the supposed original words of Theognis, it is something that could be revealed in a pristine state by an interpreter who carefully unpicks the corrupting overlays. The metaphor is a little puzzling, however, because we cannot seriously take 'eternal' to mean that beneath the fluctuating interpretations there is some kind of history-transcending, unchangeable essence that is *homo natura*.[4] Already in *Human, All too human*, Nietzsche was resolute that "everything has become: there are *no eternal facts*" (HH 2), and there is nothing to suggest he has now changed his mind. 'Eternal' is thus rather overdoing it, but the point is most likely that the kinds of interpretation Nietzsche is out to remove—metaphysical claims that the human is 'higher' or 'more' than nature—have not changed what the natural human is.

Because of its notion of 'translating the human back into nature [*den Menschen zurückübersetzen in die Natur*]', this passage has become a canonical reference point in recent philosophical discussion of Nietzsche as a naturalist,[5] and has been called "the most striking and frequently quoted expression of Nietzsche's commitment to naturalism" (Clark and Dudrick 2012, 113). Commentators may disagree widely as to the nature of Nietzsche's naturalism, but they tend to concur that he is making some kind of programmatic mission statement here. Brian Leiter links this passage with "a clarion call for methodological continuity with science" which "also involves . . . continuity with the 'result' foremost in the mind of mid-nineteenth-century Germans: that man is not of a 'higher . . . [or] of a different origin' than the rest of nature" (Leiter 2002, 7). Richard Schacht rejects that reading of Nietzsche's naturalism on the grounds of its being 'scientistic' (Schacht 2012, 238), but he agrees that in BGE 230 Nietzsche "proclaims the 'task' of 'translating man back into nature'" (Schacht 2012, 237). While this is not wrong, it is incomplete. Rather than just proclaiming the task, Nietzsche proclaims something *about the task*: that it is strange and crazy. Why? My concern is that excerpting the short *homo natura* passage oversimplifies the thought process that unfolds through BGE 230 as a whole, and that the quest to identify species of philosophical naturalism has made some commentators inattentive to the troubled character of Nietzsche's *homo natura* and the aporetic character that Nietzsche attributes to his own investigative task. In the aphorism he tells us that the task involves mental self-cruelty and a struggle with unconscious vanity, and finally—as I shall argue—that it is hard for thinkers to justify why they choose this task, unless they invoke self-glorifying epithets such as 'love of truth.'

Section 230 is important within *Beyond Good and Evil*, since it is where Nietzsche probes the questions with which the book begins, "*What* in us really wills the truth?" and "why not untruth instead?" (BGE 1).[6] We are in Part 7 of the book, "Our Virtues," and the virtue at issue here is *Redlichkeit*, honesty or probity,[7] which for Nietzschean free spirits is "the only one we have left" (BGE 227). But, taken as a whole and together with the preceding 229, BGE 230 does much to undermine or at least complicate our confidence in this virtue. Nietzsche focuses on the ambivalent and self-deceptive psychology involved in self-investigation: the task of investigating the human involves cruelty towards oneself and is entangled with vanity about oneself. Explicating BGE 230 more fully helps us understand why the basic nature of humanity can appear 'terrible' and reveals Nietzsche's analysis of the problematic nature of human self-investigation. At the end of BGE 230 Nietzsche faces the question, "Why do we choose this task of translating the human back into nature?" I argue that his question is what *value* we can attach to a naturalist self-investigation, and that he provides no satisfactory answer, thereby consciously leading us into an aporia that he does not resolve. This reading is borne out by a structural similarity with

the *Genealogy*'s well-known discussion of the will to truth, where Nietzsche addresses the wider issue concerning the justification of any inquiry into truth. Whereas in BGE 230 Nietzsche clearly seems to take the task of translating the human back into nature upon himself, in the *Genealogy* he states (GM III 24) that *his* task, the one that is *peculiar to him*, is not that of translating the human back into nature, but rather that of revealing a deep problem involved in justifying inquiry into truth, and in particular justifying the task of naturalist inquiry.[8]

2. CRUELTY

At the end of BGE 229, immediately preceding our section,[9] Nietzsche says "there is a drop of cruelty in every wanting-to-know." The butt of this cruelty is the "fundamental will of the mind" (*Grundwille des Geistes*).[10] Section 230 opens by explaining what this fundamental will is, and then returns to the idea of cruelty's being done to it by the thinker. Nietzsche describes this allegedly fundamental element of the mind using a variety of terms that teeter between the anthropomorphic and the nonanthropomorphic: will, drive, resolution, nay-saying, willingness. But, as is often the case with Nietzsche, here we must construe this 'will' as a tendency or function of the mind that operates beneath the level of any conscious desire or decision. He says, "really, 'Geist' resembles a stomach more than anything";[11] the mind's "needs and abilities" are "the same ones that physiologists have established for everything that lives, grows, and propagates"; like all living things, the mind tends towards "growth, or, more particularly, the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increasing strength"; its basic "will" is "to be master [*Herr sein*] in itself and around itself and to feel itself as master" (BGE 230). Nietzsche clearly views this tendency of the mind as a manifestation of will to power.[12] And it is plausible that this *Grundwille* is meant to be the literal incarnation of what he later metaphorically calls the *Grundtext homo natura*, or at least that it is a fundamental element of the natural human.

Nietzsche gives this *Grundwille* a complex description. Its striving for mastery manifests as incorporation, simplification, and assimilation of new things to what is familiar. It "constantly tends towards semblances and surfaces" (BGE 229). Then it also expresses itself in a way that is "seemingly opposite," in the form of a drive to *Unwissenheit*, unknowing or ignorance, and finally as a "will to be deceived" and a "willingness to deceive other minds" (BGE 230). In all these manifestations, according to Nietzsche, the human organism's cognitive capacity is geared towards its own feeling of increasing strength, not to the discovery of truth. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche had said that "[t]hrough immense periods of time, the intellect produced nothing but errors; some of them turned out to be useful and life-preserving," and that only later in human development came the "thinker" (*Denker*) in whom there arises "the drive to truth" that *opposes* such errors (GS 110). This pattern of internal antagonism is repeated in BGE 230: in the thinker or inquirer (*der Erkennende*)[13] there is a further tendency that is genuinely at odds with the mind's *Grundwille*: namely, the inquirer's "sublime tendency . . . that takes things, and *wills* to take them, deeply, multiply, fundamentally" (BGE 230). Nietzsche associates this latter tendency with the intellectual conscience, which he elsewhere describes in positive terms as what is required for any step towards self-knowledge (see GS 335). Now Nietzsche pictures the deeply inquiring intellectual conscience as cruel, as doing violence to the complacent, surfacing-loving *Grundwille* of the mind. But this need not overturn the positive evaluation of the intellectual conscience, since in BGE 229 Nietzsche has asked us to revise our assessment of cruelty. Instead of thinking only of cruelty to others and condemning it, we should realize the value to be gained from making *oneself* suffer, both in general and in the specific case of intellectual inquiry:

> even the inquirer [*der Erkennende*], by forcing his mind [*Geist*] to inquire [*erkennen*] *against* its own inclination . . . will prevail as an artist of cruelty and the agent of its transfiguration.

> Even treating something in a profound or thorough manner is a violation, a wanting-to-hurt the fundamental will of the mind, which constantly tends towards semblances and surfaces,—there is a drop of cruelty in every wanting-to-know [*Erkennen-Wollen*]. (BGE 229)

Here the mind of the thinker appears to divide into two, in a way reminiscent of Nietzsche's earlier pronouncements that "in the human being, *creature* and *creator* are combined" and that "the 'creature in humans' . . . needs to *suffer* and *should* suffer" (BGE 225).[14]

We might pause to ask: In what way does a thinker 'harm' the basic simplifying tendency of the mind, or make it "suffer"? Compare familiar kinds of self-inflicted suffering. Having to wake up in the early hours, your circadian clock tends towards sleep, but you force upon yourself the discomfort of wakeful activity; or, to use the hackneyed example, the marathon-runner's whole metabolism 'wants' to stop and rest but she pushes it into pain and stress. Nietzsche likewise views the 'thinker' as imposing stress and discomfort on the part of the mind that 'naturally' contents itself with commonplaces and superficialities. To inquire profoundly is to inflict doubt, disorientation, and anxiety upon your own mind.[15] Suppose then that this notion of intellectual self-cruelty makes sense, and is to be analysed by splitting the cognitive make-up of at least some human beings (the 'thinkers', 'inquirers', or 'knowers') into two elements: (1) an animalistic, stomach-like function that processes experiences through assimilation and surface-appearance, and (2) a distinct intellectual conscience that pushes the stomach-like mind out of its comfort zone. What then is *homo natura*? We surmised above that the literal counterpart of the metaphorical basic text (*Grundtext*) was the mind's basic will (*Grundwille*). But is the thinker's penetrating intellectual conscience also part of that "eternal basic text"? A tension begins to emerge here. On the one hand, nothing pertaining to the human thinker can fail to be part of nature, unless it were to be 'something more' or 'something higher'—precisely what the self-disciplined Nietzschean thinker must resist thinking. Moreover, Nietzsche describes the inquirer's task of uncovering the genuine *homo natura* as that of "becoming master" (*Herr werden*) over many false interpretations, suggesting that the investigation itself must be just as much a tendency towards "growth . . . the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increasing strength" as is the stomach-like mind. In that case, the investigator's intellectual conscience is not really different in kind from the stomach-like mind it works against. On the other hand, here's the rub: as an investigator, it is hard to resist thinking of oneself as 'something more', because of the promptings of human vanity.

3. VANITY

Vanity is a prominent theme in BGE 230: it is human vanity that has led to false interpretations of the human; the task at hand is the scraping away of these effects of vanity; but the task also falls paradoxically to a compromised investigator, whose own vanity gets in the way. Here is how Nietzsche transitions from cruelty to vanity:

> [A brave thinker] will say "There is something cruel in the tendency of my mind". . . . In fact, it would sound more polite [*artiger*] if, instead of cruelty, people were to accuse, mutter about and praise us as having a sort of "wild honesty [*ausschweifende Redlichkeit*]"— free, *very* free spirits that we are:—and perhaps *this* is what our reputation will really be—posthumously? But in the meantime . . . we are the least likely to dress ourselves up with these sorts of moral baubles and beads: all the work we have done so far has spoiled our taste for precisely this sort of bright opulence. These are beautiful, twinkling, tinkling, festive words: honesty, love of truth, love of wisdom, sacrifice for knowledge, the heroism of truthfulness,—there is something about them that makes you swell with pride. But we hermits and marmots, we convinced

> ourselves a long time ago and in all the secrecy of a hermit's conscience that even this dignified verbal pageantry belongs among the false old finery, debris, and gold dust of unconscious human vanity [*Eitelkeit*], and that even underneath these fawning colours and painted surfaces the terrible basic text of *homo natura* must be recognized again. (BGE 230)

There is a typically Nietzschean richness of texture here, which we may miss if we fixate on the single upcoming phrase "translating the human back into nature." It would sound "nicer,"[16] Nietzsche says, if we could assign a heroic value to our inquiry—a value which he calls *moral*. If what drove our inquiry were an intrinsically valuable 'truthfulness', 'love of truth', or 'sacrifice for knowledge', a commitment that was 'unconditional' in the sense of overriding all others, then we could regard it as an activity of which we could be proud.[17] But now we see that these morally loaded *self*-descriptions are *themselves* the vain and fanciful overlaid scribblings that the deep inquirer needs to see past. In a draft version of his text Nietzsche wrote that "this is a hard and almost cruel task. One who works at it has himself as opponent" (KSA 14 366, my translation). The inquirer's proud self-image is compromised by the inquiry.

Now we can appreciate why *homo natura* is *schrecklich*. The thinker's profoundly questioning intellectual conscience is not some pure, nature-transcending capacity, but is as much part of *homo natura* as is the stomach-like mind. To recognize *homo natura* is to recognize oneself as something at odds with itself: a surface-loving mental digestive system being pushed into pain and discomfort by its own overdeveloped tendency towards the feeling of growth and strength. The revelation of *homo natura* is horrifying to us because we retain the unconscious vanity (*unbewusste Eitelkeit*) that still inclines us towards finer, more self-gratifying descriptions of ourselves as inquirers, those "beautiful, twinkling, tinkling" words that promise us intrinsic and over-riding value. At least part of what Nietzsche has in mind is the Platonic picture he highlighted in his Preface, "Plato's invention of pure *Geist* and the Good in itself" (BGE, Preface). The enticing 'metaphysics' to be resisted is the ingrained picture of *oneself*, the inquirer, as a pure, virtuous, truth-seeking intellect whose function is the apprehension of an unconditionally valuable truth. Hence the task of uncovering *homo natura* is 'strange' and 'crazy' to us because it goes against the powerful pull of our own unconscious vanity. From the point of view of this vanity, erasure of the false metaphysical descriptions diminishes our value, making us look banal, self-conflicted, and a little squalid. Our inquiry's outcome is the let-down that the inquirer was never something to which those finer evaluative terms apply.

4. NO BETTER ANSWER

BGE 230 has an elliptical ending that effectively poses again the book's opening question:

> Why do we choose it, this crazy task? Or to ask it differently: "Why inquiry [*Erkenntniss*] at all?"—Everybody will be asking us this. And we who have been prodded so much, we who have asked ourselves the same question a hundred times already, we have not found and are not finding any better answer . . . (BGE 230).

It is not obvious how to take this ending. First, we must decide what kind of 'why' question faces us. Are we in need of an explanation of what it is about us that makes us knowledge-seeking beings? Laurence Lampert suggests that Nietzsche means "no better answer than the answer just given that there are two natural inclinations of the mind" (Lampert 2001, 231.) That would provide an explanatory answer: we inquire into *homo natura* because our minds are naturally set up to do it.[18] However, Nietzsche poses his 'Why?' question in the context of *choice*. What makes the task—'crazy' though it is—choiceworthy for us?[19] Nietzsche is asking not for an

explanation, but for a *justification* of the task of translating the human back into nature. What makes it a worthwhile task? What value can we attach to it? Given that BGE 230 is where the questions of BGE 1 are addressed, we should recall the distinction made there:

> *What* in us really wills the truth? In fact, we paused for a long time before the question of the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete standstill (*ganz und gar stehen blieben*) in front of an even more fundamental question. We asked about the *value* of this will. . . . The problem of the value of truth came before us. (BGE 1)

There are two questions: 'What is the *cause* of our willing truth?' and 'What is the *value* of our willing truth?' The latter is explicitly the 'more fundamental' for Nietzsche, and it is the question that he says brings us to a standstill. At the end of BGE 230 Nietzsche re-stages that same standstill. We lack a 'better answer' to the question about the value of pursuing truth, and in particular about the value of translating the human back into nature.

In writing "not . . . any better answer," Nietzsche seems to imply that there is already an *extant answer* to the question 'What is the value of inquiry into *homo natura*?', but that the extant answer is unsatisfactory. What is this extant but deficient answer? I suggest it is the answer already present in the foregoing passages: the idea that what justifies naturalistic inquiry into ourselves is that knowledge is of overriding value, and that in pursuing the truth about *homo natura* we undertake a 'moral' task of self-sacrifice for something 'higher'. Nietzsche suggests that these almost irresistible self-descriptions are what we unconsciously want to tell ourselves as inquirers. He is claiming that this kind of justification for the task of translating the human back into nature is all we have so far, but that we must reject it, because it makes us out to be 'something higher' than nature. If this is our only kind of justificatory answer, and yet it is precisely the answer we cannot give without undermining the whole 'back into nature' project, then Nietzsche leaves us lacking any answer to the question 'Why translate the human back into nature?' and thus in aporia. The book's opening question concerning the value of truth thus appears in more specific form, but the standstill in answering it has not been overcome.[20]

5. THE DISCIPLINE OF SCIENCE

So in BGE 230 Nietzsche calls the task of translating the human back into nature strange and crazy, and leaves it lacking a justification—this we must acknowledge, irrespective of what we think his naturalism is. But what can we deduce about the character of Nietzsche's naturalism from the passage that is allegedly its canonical 'proclamation' or 'clarion call'? Nietzsche writes of the human who will

> stand before the human, as today he already stands, hardened in the discipline of science, before the *rest* of nature,—with un-terrified [*unerschrockene*] Oedipus eyes and sealed up Odysseus ears, deaf to the lures of the old metaphysical bird catchers who have been whistling to him for far too long: "You are more! You are higher! You have a different origin!" (BGE 230)[21]

This characterization of naturalism is largely negative: an investigative task in which the human being is *not* to be described as more, higher, or different in origin from the rest of nature.[22] On the other hand, the term 'naturalism' is regularly applied to forms of inquiry that are essentially linked to entities and methods recognized by the natural sciences, and by mentioning science (*Wissenschaft*), Nietzsche seems to hint at a more positive characterization of the task along these lines. As mentioned above, Leiter (2002, 6–7) gave strong

impetus to this way of reading BGE 230, by attributing to Nietzsche two continuities with science ('Methods' and 'Results' Continuity). However, I want to suggest that the text offers little more than a hint and that science is not among Nietzsche's primary concerns in this passage.[23] My three grounds are as follows. (1) The publication history of BGE 230 shows that science did not figure in Nietzsche's complex evolving theme as he began to compose the aphorism. (2) In the published version, the relation between science and the investigation of *homo natura* is unclear and may be construed simply as one of analogy. (3) Even allowing that Nietzsche thinks that *homo natura* is to be investigated literally by *Wissenschaft*, it is not obvious what that would involve.

At one stage during the preparation of his text in 1885, Nietzsche arrived at a draft version of the ending of BGE 230.[24] Here is that version in my translation:

> Translating the human back into nature, becoming master over the many false interpretations and incidental meanings that the vanity of humans has scrawled and smeared over and beside the nature-text "human," bringing it about that the human stands before the human as before nature, and shuts its ears to the seductive voices that call to it: "You are more! You are higher! You have a different origin!"—this is a hard and almost cruel task. One who works at it has himself as opponent as much as his fellow humans. And why does he work at this purpose [*Absicht*]? Especially since he should not bring forward the fine words "love of truth," "honesty [*Redlichkeit*]," "sacrifice for knowledge" and the like, when he has shown that all this is vanity's rubbish and splendour, in short that he is too vain to permit himself such meagre gratifications of vanity:—why? Such a human is a problem. (KSA 14 366)

Here, and in Nietzsche's other preparatory reworkings, there is no mention of science. That suggests that science was not a prominent aspect of what he was trying to convey. One may counter that little hangs on the mere absence of a word here. *Wissenschaft* is an important theme across Nietzsche's writings as a whole, and may in this passage have been an unspoken subtext, which then came to the surface in the published version with the addition of a new clause—that the human should stand before the human "as today he already stands, hardened in the discipline of science, before the *rest* of nature." But, at least, if Nietzsche's main point here specifically had science as its theme, he could have made that more obvious.

Secondly, the new clause—"*wie er heute schon, hart geworden in der Zucht der Wissenschaft, vor der* anderen *Natur steht*"—includes science in the description of what our stance towards *the rest of nature* has already become, but strictly speaking does not say that we should stand "in the discipline of science" before *the human*. The word for "discipline" is *Zucht*, which Nietzsche often associates with a lengthy practice and training that results in self-mastery.[25] Nietzsche has talked about the thinker's discipline (*Zucht*) earlier in the section, saying that "any brave thinker will acknowledge [a type of cruelty] in himself, assuming that he has spent as long as he should in hardening and sharpening his eye for himself, and that he is used to strict discipline as well as strict words" (BGE 230). Thinkers thus require a trained 'hardness', an ability to scrutinize their own inner complexities, drives, and self-interpretations, and to resist flattering false descriptions of themselves. It is not clear in what sense this self-disciplined 'eye for oneself' relates to 'science', other than by way of analogy. That is to say, science has trained us in a kind of self-control, so that we can resist 'deifying'[26] nature and regard it in a more objective, dispassionate, and nonmoralizing manner; by analogy, we should now attempt to resist temptation and regard ourselves in a more objective, dispassionate, and nonmoralizing manner, adopting a rigorous scrutiny of our beliefs. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche appears to link science and rigorous self-observation in the same loose kind of way: "we, . . . we reason-thirsty ones, want to face our experiences *as sternly as* [*so streng . . . wie*] a scientific experiment" (GS 319, my emphasis, translation modified). In

thus facing ourselves, it is our equal degree of sternness that matters, the discipline rather than the science.

On the other hand, if it is science that helps us to take a disciplined stance towards the rest of nature, and if the human is to be placed back *in* this nature, then it would be reasonable for a disciplined stance towards the human also to be 'scientific'. But in what sense? The single world *Wissenschaft* tells us little, since it applies widely to many forms of disciplined study and scholarship. John Richardson suggests with some plausibility that Nietzsche is implicitly invoking "the sciences of history and psychology" (Richardson 2020, 310). In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche distinguishes between a 'natural' and an 'unnatural' science, the latter being "what I call the self-critique of knowledge [*Erkenntniss-Selbstkritik*]" (GM III 25), most likely in allusion to Kant's critical enterprise.[27] On another view, some of Nietzsche's discussions of *Wissenschaft* apply to "intellectual activity governed by the will to truth—paradigmatically, his own work in philosophy" (Jenkins 2012, 273–74).Then again, Nietzsche had recently championed the notion of a 'joyful science', which could also be relevant here.[28] But really we are left to speculate, so that even if we are to approach *homo natura* by practicing some kind of *Wissenschaft*, as yet unexplained, that really tells us little more than that we should be rigorous and self-critical, and more or less amounts to the above analogical reading.

Thus, BGE 230 urges the investigator to resist traditional metaphysical conceptions of the human as 'more', 'higher', or 'different', and nods towards a parallel between 'science' and the task of 'standing before the human', but does little to confirm or disconfirm any determinate view that we might term naturalism.[29] A more systematic naturalist view may well be discernible in a wider spread of Nietzschean texts. My point here is that BGE 230 in particular, despite its reputation as Nietzsche's most striking expression of naturalism, is relatively uninformative on that score. That is not surprising if, as we have argued, Nietzsche's business in BGE 230 is not to propose any particular theory of naturalist inquiry, but to show that applying naturalist inquiry to ourselves, whether 'scientifically' or not, involves self-inflicted cruelty, a fight against vanity, and an absence of any adequate answer to the question concerning the inquiry's value. In short, BGE 230 is aporetic rather than programmatic.

6. THE WILL TO TRUTH AND NIETZSCHE'S TASK

The aporia we have identified in BGE 230 is not confined to that passage. We find a parallel train of thought in the well-known passages on the will to truth as a manifestation of the ascetic ideal at the end of the *Genealogy*. As described in BGE 230, inquiry already fits into an ascetic template: it is a form or self-cruelty that justifies itself as pursuit of something 'higher', an end whose value transcends the natural human. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche again questions the value of inquiry into truth *tout court*. He characterizes the will to truth as "unconditional" (GM III 24)—it assigns an overriding value to the pursuit of truth in "science," the latter term now clearly embracing philosophy—and he spells out a hitherto unquestioned justification for such inquiry:

> Science itself now is *in need of* a justification (which is not to say that there is one). On this question, just look at the earliest and the most recent philosophies: all of them lack a consciousness of the extent to which the will to truth itself first needs a justification, here there is a gap in every philosophy—why is that? Because the ascetic ideal has until now been *lord* over all philosophy, because truth was posited as God, as highest authority; because truth was not *permitted* to be a problem . . . . The will to truth is in need of a critique—let us thus define our own task—the value of truth is for once to be experimentally *called into question*. . . . (GM III 24)

This makes explicit the extant answer to the question of justification, the one we could not improve upon, that remained unstated at the end of BGE 230. Just as there we had no better answer than the "twinkling, tinkling, festive words: honesty, love of truth, love of wisdom, sacrifice for knowledge, the heroism of truthfulness" (BGE 230), so now our only justification lies in conceiving truth "as God, as highest authority" (GM III 24). Truth and its pursuit by those who inquire into it have been deemed beyond the need for justification, or at least have been regarded as self-evidently justified because of a tacit assumption of their overriding value. If we call into question that kind of justification for inquiry itself, we again find we have no better answer. But still Nietzsche's focus is on *naturalistic* inquiry. The 'scientific' investigators he targets satisfy the same descriptions as the profound 'thinker' or 'inquirer' of BGE 230; namely, they are the ones "in whom alone the intellectual conscience today dwells," whose character is "hard, strict, abstinent, heroic," and who share with Nietzsche the distinction of being "atheists, anti-Christians, immoralists" (GM III 24). Nietzsche explicitly includes himself in the target group:

> It is still a *metaphysical* belief on which our belief in science rests—we inquirers (*Erkennenden*) today, we godless ones and anti-metaphysicians, we too still take *our* fire from that great fire that was ignited by a thousand-year old belief, that belief of Christians, which was also Plato's belief, that God is truth, that truth is *divine*. . . . (GM III 24, translation modified)

In BGE 230 Nietzsche portrayed his own task as strange, crazy, and lacking clear justification. But it at least seemed clear *what his task was*—that of 'translating the human back into nature'. By contrast, he now claims a distinct task as peculiarly his. "Let us define our own task—the value of truth is for once to be experimentally *called into question*" (GM III 24). He even says that his unique *meaning* lies in this: "I again touch on my problem, on our problem, my *unknown* friends (—for I as yet *know* of no friends): what meaning [*Sinn*] would *our* entire being have if not this, that in us this will to truth has come to a consciousness of itself *as a problem*?" (GM III 27). Nietzsche here does not view his personal mission as 'translating the human back into nature'; after all, naturalistic inquiry is going on all around him, among people who mistakenly think they are free of the ascetic ideal while retaining a 'metaphysical' faith in the unconditional value of truth. Nietzsche's own task, rather, is that of pointing out that, while naturalism is the only intellectually respectable form of inquiry in his day, it cannot (or cannot yet) justify itself except by invoking a 'higher' kind of value for truth and inquiry, a kind that naturalism itself forbids.

7. VANITY VANQUISHED?

So far we have seen that by the time of writing the *Genealogy* Nietzsche locates his distinctive significance as a thinker in revealing the problematic nature of the naturalist task: he thinks that naturalist inquiry cannot provide a justification for itself without stepping outside of naturalism by viewing the inquirer and/or truth as 'something higher'. He is the one who has become conscious of this as a problem. But is it a problem that can be overcome? Could we learn to abandon our vanity, accept the picture of ourselves as growth-seeking, stomach-like minds whose components turn cruelly upon themselves, and at the same time find value in the project of revealing that picture of ourselves? It might be argued that such a resolution is strictly impossible. Adopting a Kantian or transcendentalist standpoint, Sebastian Gardner argues that there is a "lack of fit between Nietzsche's theoretical view of the self and the view of the self required for Nietzsche's values" (Gardner 2009, 7). On this view, the very notion of *valuing* requires a conception of oneself as a unified 'I' in a way that in principle goes beyond any naturalistic description. One might also argue that the basic notion of a *task* (*Aufgabe*) seems already to

presuppose a conception of oneself as a unified autonomous agent, the kind of being to whom a task can be given. If either of these claims is true, then we *could not* place a value upon the task of naturalistic enquiry without thinking of ourselves as 'more' than a collection of power-seeking and self-harming drives.[30] However, Nietzsche (rightly or wrongly) shows no signs of entertaining such a position.[31] For him it is not necessity that pushes us to regard ourselves as 'other' than nature, but vanity. If this is construed as a contingently existing psychological state with a historical origin, then although the state is unconscious, deeply ingrained, and hard to shake off, we could in principle liberate ourselves from its influence upon our self-conception. The vanity could fade away in time or we could rise to the task of overcoming it. The price to pay, according to Nietzsche's diagnosis, is that we would then remove the only justification we have had so far for pursuing the naturalistic truth about ourselves.

But would that be a problem? With vanity vanquished, why hanker after an unconditional value for naturalist inquiry?[32] We might suspect that Nietzsche has created a false dilemma here. For naturalistic inquiry to have a value, it is not necessary that it have a value that overrides all others. Its lacking overriding value would therefore not *ipso facto* leave it with no justification at all. To appreciate Nietzsche's position here, we should remind ourselves of two factors, both of which are manifest in the final six sections of the *Genealogy*. First, Nietzsche is raising a problem for a specific kind of inquirer: those who "still believe in truth," the "last idealists of knowledge in whom alone the intellectual conscience today dwells" (GM III 24). These people, among whom Nietzsche numbers himself as a doubting insider, work under the tacit presupposition of overriding value for truth, and it is they that face the dilemma. It would not face someone who regarded inquiring into the truth about ourselves as just one of the many good activities one could go in for. People with this latter outlook, however, face an even greater problem in Nietzsche's eyes, because of the second factor: the need to find *some* overriding value. "Where," Nietzsche asks, "is the other 'one goal'" to replace the ascetic ideal? (GM III 23) Without such a single privileged goal, he says, human beings will be fundamentally at a loss, wondering *Wozu überhaupt Mensch?*—to what end the human at all? (GM III 28). If pursuit of the truth about *homo natura* lacks overriding value, then, in the absence of any other such value, *homo* as such loses point and direction. If Nietzsche is right that humans need a *Wozu überhaupt*, it becomes easier to see why he thinks it so deeply problematic that naturalistic inquiry, having rid itself of divine and nature-transcending sources of value, should itself lack justification in terms of an overriding value.

However, if Nietzsche can no longer assign unconditional value to the pursuit of truth through naturalistic inquiry, there is no need for him to find it without value. He can regard it as having value because it is instrumental towards to a further valuable end, such as the revaluation of values, a process that can in principle result in discovery of a new overriding value. There is no doubt that in his works of 1886–87 Nietzsche's governing aim is to place himself and any sympathetic reader 'beyond good and evil', so that we refrain from making customary moral evaluations, view them as damaging to the potential for human "power and splendour" (GM Preface, 6), and at least experimentally start to value many things differently, in terms of, for example, 'life' or 'power'. Providing a convincing naturalistic description of human beings can undermine the "fundamental belief of metaphysicians" that opposed values must have different origins, and that the good must proceed from somewhere outside of nature (BGE 2). For Nietzsche, this can be instrumental in drawing us away from morality. In fact, even embarking on the naturalistic project—the process of inquiry itself rather than its actual truth-findings—may have a similar effect. On this view, the ultimate goal is not that of describing *homo natura*, but of changing people's values. Brian Leiter in effect asserts this, by saying that "the 'revaluation of values' involves enlisting the Humean [naturalist] Nietzsche for the Therapeutic Nietzsche's ends" (Leiter 2013, 582). This is not to say that giving a naturalistic account of the human

was not important to Nietzsche, merely that it serves as a means to his evaluative ends. He has at his disposal other means to the same ends. One is to write an imaginary history of earlier master-slave relationships in which current moral values have an origin in questionable states such as *ressentiment*. Another is to create a long, poetically embellished tale of a lonely prophetic figure wrestling with his values. Another is to think of what it would be to affirm the eternal recurrence of everything. Nietzsche regarded his invention of Zarathustra and his idea of the eternal recurrence as his greatest achievements.[33] So for his purposes these means are perhaps of greater instrumental value to him than naturalism.

8. CONCLUSION

Section 230 of *Beyond Good and Evil* is often regarded as announcing a programme of philosophical naturalism that is definitive of Nietzsche's aims. I have argued that if the notion of 'translating the human back into nature' is read in context, embedded in the text that Nietzsche composed and published, a much more complex picture emerges of Nietzsche's attitude towards naturalism. First, Nietzsche does not simply announce translating the human back into nature as a straightforward task of inquiry. Rather, he problematizes it as something 'strange' and 'crazy'. The investigator who takes on this task can be nothing but the very *homo natura* he or she investigates, and is nothing but a combination of a natural simplifying process that seeks power over its environment and another process that cruelly makes its mind suffer by pursuing truth. As investigators we rebel against viewing ourselves as this *homo natura*, because our vanity tempts us to describe the search for truth as an exercise of 'higher' value. The temptation works upon us unconsciously. Ever since Plato, Nietzsche believes, we have been beguiled into seeing truth as something of overriding or even 'divine' value, its pursuit as virtuous and heroic, and ourselves as pure intellects that somehow transcend nature.

Second, when Nietzsche asks 'Why do we pursue this task of uncovering *homo natura*?' he is asking after a justification for the task. He claims that we have tacitly assumed an overriding justification for it, which has involved viewing truth and ourselves as something 'higher' than nature. This, he claims, is (a) our only extant justification, and (b) one which, as naturalists, we can no longer believe in. The upshot is that the closing sentences of BGE 230 lead us into an aporia or, as Nietzsche says in BGE 1, a "standstill," with naturalistic inquiry unable to justify itself except by contravening itself. By the time he writes the *Genealogy* Nietzsche no longer identifies *his own* peculiar task as that of translating the human back into nature, or that of performing naturalist inquiry more generally. His task—and even his whole 'meaning'—is to reveal to naturalistic inquirers the problem they face: unbeknown to themselves, they are acting out the ascetic ideal. The only justification they have is their unconscious assumption that truth and their self-harming quest for it bears an unconditional value. They have thought of no better answer to the question of justification. But this answer must be rejected by naturalists.

Third, the naturalism announced in BGE 230 is chiefly characterized in negative terms, as regarding ourselves *not* in certain ways. Nietzsche makes one reference to 'science', but it is a not a major theme in this passage. The focus is on our taking a 'hardened', disciplined attitude towards ourselves as investigators. Nietzsche makes a parallel between this attitude and a scientific one, but does not make clear how science would be involved in our self-investigation, and may, as I argued, intend the parallel as simply one of analogy. Besides, even if translating the human back into nature is meant to be a 'scientific' task, it is not clear what 'science' is meant to comprise here.

Finally, if, as Nietzsche alleges, the only extant justification we have found for naturalistic inquiry is a function of our history and our vanity, we may be able to free ourselves of the need to posit any unconditional value for our task of inquiry. The answer to the question 'Why pursue a

naturalistic account of the human?' may be answered solely in terms of some instrumental value, and in Nietzsche's case a naturalist account helps to remove the metaphysics that underpin the values he seeks to call into question and paves the way for different values. Then Nietzsche does not need to assign naturalistic inquiry any value in itself and can regard it as one means, perhaps not necessarily the most important, towards his evaluative goals.[34]

NOTES

1. I use the Cambridge translation of BGE, but often modify details, and in some cases retranslate.
   In this issue of *The Monist* on "Nietzsche and Ethics," Nietzsche's works are cited by section (and, where relevant, chapter/part) number, and follow the abbreviations established by the North American Nietzsche Society: A = *The Antichrist*; AOM = *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*; BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*; BT = *The Birth of Tragedy*; CW = *The Case of Wagner*; D = *Daybreak*; EH = *Ecce Homo*; GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality*; GS = *The Gay Science*; HH = *Human, All Too Human*; SE = *Schopenhauer as Educator*; TI = *Twilight of the Idols*; UM = *Untimely Meditations*; WP = *The Will to Power*; WS = *The Wanderer and His Shadow*; Z = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Additionally, KSA = Nietzsche's *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* and KSB = *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe*.
2. Nietzsche's word is *toll*. I shall substitute 'crazy' for 'insane' in what follows.
3. Kaufmann's translation encourages neglect of this last question by simply offering no translation at all for *schrecklich*.
4. This point is made clearly by Brusotti (2013, 269).
5. Dating back especially to Leiter (2002, 6–7).
6. As Clark and Dudrick say, BGE 1 announces that "the will to truth must eventually confront the question as to its own value," but the confrontation "does not occur until BGE 230" (2012, 33). For similar views, see Brusotti (2013, 262) and Lampert (2001, 231).
7. For the translation 'probity', see, e.g., Lampert (2001, 221); Acampora and Ansell Pearson (2011), Lemm (2017); Lemm (2020, *passim*, and see 12 n. 6 on the difficulty of translating *Redlichkeit*).
8. My account in some respects parallels that of Scott Jenkins, who says that the question of BGE 1, "'Why not rather untruth? . . .' . . . asks for a justification for this kind of truthfulness," but that "Nietzsche's critical account of our will to truth does not even suggest a provisional answer to this question" (Jenkins 2012, 266).
9. Brusotti points out that in draft versions sections 229 and 230 were in reverse order (2013, 272).
10. I render *Geist* as "mind." The customary translation "spirit" is apt to bring misleading connotations. Nietzsche is here concerned with the mind in its capacity for understanding and belief-formation. Notice also that *Geist* is here treated as a folk-psychological concept, not as part of any explanatory ontology to which Nietzsche is committed.
11. On *Geist* as stomach, see also Z III, "Tablets," 16.
12. Compare, e.g., BGE 9, 13, 211, 259. Nietzsche's only other recorded use of the expression "homo natura" is the extremely terse wording in the Nachlass: "*Homo natura*. *Der 'Wille zur Macht'*" (KSA 12:2 [131], 132).
13. Since Nietzsche is concerned with knowledge as a task, I shall sometimes treat his term *Erkenntniss* as "inquiry" and *Erkennender* as "inquirer." Nietzsche's paradigm of knowledge is frequently *zetetic* rather than doxastic. See Berry (2011, 33–41) on the origin of this distinction in the ancient Greek sceptics, and 88–95 in application to Nietzsche. For an example of the distinction in contemporary epistemology, see Friedman (2020). Nietzsche is often concerned with the exercise of seeking knowledge, rather than with what constitutes being in a state of knowing. GM Preface, 1 is a good example, where "we knowers" (*Erkennenden*) are in fact inquirers who are "forever underway" to "the beehives of our knowledge," *seeking* knowledge, but not seeking ourselves. In GS 110 Nietzsche couples *Erkenntniss* with "the striving for the true." In GS 324 he says of "*Erkenntniss* itself . . . for me it is a world of dangers and victories"—an attitude that is more appropriate to the stages in the process of inquiry from doubt to potential discovery than to the mere state of knowing something.
14. Thus the intellectual conscience turns out to be part of Nietzsche's campaign to overturn customary evaluations of suffering and compassion. Compare "Should you refuse to let your suffering lie on you even for an hour and instead constantly prevent all possible misfortune ahead of time; should you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence, then you have besides your religion of pity also another religion in your hearts, and the latter is perhaps

the mother of the former—*the religion of snug cosiness*" (GS 338). Instead of protecting the part of our mind that suffers when we become thinkers, we should regard its suffering positively.

15. Nietzsche elsewhere talks of "suffer[ing] from . . . a train of thought as if from sea-sickness" (BGE 23), and of the profound questioner's experience of "a dizziness, every sort of mistrust, suspicion, fear" (GM, Preface 6).
16. Kaufmann's translation for *artiger*.
17. Nietzsche speaks of the unconditional nature of the will to truth (GS 344; GM III 24). For this unconditionality as *overridingness*, see Jenkins (2012, 269).
18. Lampert suggests alternative answers which I shall not discuss here. Other commentators seem to offer similar answers to an explanatory 'Why?' question. Sommer (2016, 651) says that BGE 230's open question could find an answer in "the mind's own domineering logic" (*in der herrschsüchtigen Eigenlogik des Geistes*). Brusotti (2013, 276) says the most likely answer is that the inquirer is driven by cruelty directed at the *Grundwille* of the mind. John Richardson says, "I take the answer to be 'that we must'" (Richardson 2020, 310). It is not clear, however, what the force of the "must" is here (normative or deterministic?), nor indeed whether this is intended to be the already extant answer or some implied answer that improves upon it.
19. Gudrun von Tevenar (private communication) notes that *toll* can have the positive connotation of something wild, daring, and exciting. In BGE 1 Nietzsche talks of being the first to have *risked* (*gewagt*) posing the question of the value of truth. But he is not suggesting that the question of justification can be answered simply by noting that the pursuit of truth is itself risky and daring. Rather, its *Tollheit* is troubling. Hence I think that in BGE 230 positive connotations of *toll* cannot be uppermost.
20. Some commentators read the following section, BGE 231, as resolving the closing lacuna of BGE 230. Vanessa Lemm (2020, 16, 66) argues that Nietzsche provides a positive justificatory answer to the question 'Why . . . this crazy task?' encapsulated in the words that open BGE 231, "Learning transforms us [*Das Lernen verwandelt uns*]." Rachel Cristy has suggested (in discussion) that BGE 231's "brick wall of spiritual *fatum*" contains the clue to the better answer to the question at the end of BGE 230. See also Lampert (2001, 231). I cannot do justice to these readings here. While some adjacent sections in Nietzsche's works clearly form a sequential train of thought, in other cases an ending with an ellipsis simply remains enigmatic and generally thought-provoking. I view BGE 230's ending as a case of the latter. Besides, in BGE 231 Nietzsche is embarking on a new continuous theme (carried on till the end of Part 7): "when it comes to men and women, . . . a thinker cannot change his views." The idea of a spiritual (or perhaps better, intellectual) *fatum* gives him an excuse—he just can't help it—for some unattractive views about women.
21. Translation modified. The Oedipus and Odysseus metaphors may call for some comment. The 'Odysseus ears' are sealed, whereas in his original encounter with the sirens, Odysseus precisely did *not* seal his ears, enabling him to hear the seductive voices and have the strength to resist them. The 'Oedipus eyes' are *unerschrocken*, while the eyes of the classical Oedipus were blinded because he *was terrified* by the truth he had sought about himself. Nietzsche's message seems to be that *unlike* the latter we should remain unflinchingly open to the (naturalistic) truth about ourselves, but that, *unlike* the former, we cannot resist the lure of the metaphysical self-descriptions if we allow ourselves to hear them. Thanks to Andrew Huddleston and Chris Sykes for drawing attention to this part of the text.
22. In an earlier piece of writing, I stated that Nietzsche "opposes transcendent metaphysics, whether that of Plato or of Christianity or of Schopenhauer. He rejects notions of the immaterial soul, the absolutely free controlling will, or the self-transparent pure intellect" (Janaway 2007, 34). In other words, Nietzsche characterises 'nature' negatively by excluding from it all entities or capacities that earlier philosophers have posited as belonging to some essentially nonempirical realm. Leiter (2013, 577) agrees that the above statement is "descriptively adequate to some of what Nietzsche says in a naturalistic spirit," but criticizes it as a mere list that is inadequate to delineate what naturalism is. That criticism assumes that Nietzsche is a naturalist in some more interesting and systematic sense. The (supposedly canonical) text of BGE 230, at any rate, is insufficient to bear out such an assumption, because Nietzsche's characterization is even vaguer, with the task in question simply ruling out our being 'more', 'higher', or 'different in origin'.
23. It is striking that the extremely thorough philological analyses of BGE 230 by Brusotti (2013) and Sommer (2016) contain not a single comment on the theme of science, or on the occurrence of the word *Wissenschaft* in the aphorism.
24. This represents a snapshot of one stage in the gestation of BGE 230 from notes to publication. For the complex fuller story, see Brusotti (2013) and Sommer (2016).

25. See, e.g., D 18, 111; HH Preface; BGE 210, 219.
26. See the parallel thought at GS 109, where the emphasis in 'naturalizing humanity' is again predominantly negative, namely with God *not* in the picture (*die Natur ganz entgöttlicht*). Nietzsche does state positively that the character of the world is 'for all eternity chaos', but the main point is that forms of order, beauty etc. are anthropomorphisms that we should resist imposing upon it.
27. Thanks to Tim Stoll for this observation.
28. For example, Christa Acampora links BGE 230 to a notion of 'artful naturalism', in which the opposition between science and art could be "utilized in such a way as to allow each to appropriate the resources of the other in pursuit of their ends" (Acampora 2013, 91).
29. This recapitulates the discussion in Janaway and Robertson (2012, 3).
30. As Gardner points out, the transcendental reading would not require reification of the unified 'I' into "the specific, hypostasized, Platonized conception of the I that plays such an important role in Christianity and theologically contaminated philosophy" (Gardner 2009, 12). So Nietzsche's view—either we sustain a 'higher' sense of value (pride in ourselves) by positing real, metaphysical souls or intellects somewhere outside of nature, or we collapse into the 'terrible' *homo natura*—is unnecessarily polarized. Were he to take on board Kant's point in the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, Nietzsche could hold that there is a transcendental requirement to conceive ourselves as a unified 'I' that is not reducible to nature, but that so conceiving ourselves carries no implication that we are entities 'other' than nature.
31. Lanier Anderson critiques Gardner's view, saying that it "seems to be based primarily on an a priori argument identifying alleged presuppositions of Nietzschean positions, rather than any direct argument from Nietzsche's texts" (Anderson 2012, 206). I agree that there is no clear evidence of Nietzsche's acknowledging a transcendental requirement of the kind Gardner argues for.
32. As Aaron Ridley has pointed out (private communication), in works later than BGE and GM Nietzsche is apt to valorize the search for truth. See A 50: "We have to wring the truth out of ourselves every step of the way, we have to give up almost everything that our heart, our love, our trust in life relied on. It requires greatness of soul. The service of truth is the hardest service." Is this Nietzsche succumbing to his unconscious vanity and failing to shut his ears to BGE 230's beautiful tinkling words, which included "sacrifice for knowledge" and "the heroism of truthfulness"? I don't think we can answer conclusively. However, in this context, and in the similar passage at EH, Preface 3, the emphasis is on the unpleasantness of the task of inquiry and the courage required for it. These can be features of a task whose value is solely instrumental, or at least not unconditional or overriding.
33. See Ansell-Pearson and Loeb 2022, 4–5, 8–9.
34. I am grateful for comments on earlier versions from Jessica Berry, Ken Gemes, Paul Loeb, Aaron Ridley, Gudrun von Tevenar, and participants in the KCL/Nova Nietzsche seminar in December 2023, including especially João Constâncio, Rachel Cristy, Andrew Huddleston, Christine Lopes, Simon May, Alex Prescott-Couch, Lorenzo Serini, John Skorupksi, Tim Stoll, and Chris Sykes.

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