AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

SELF-INTEREST: WHOSE GAME IS IT ANYWAY? UTILITARIANISM AND AGENCY IN NIETZSCHE

by

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SELF-INTEREST: WHOSE GAME IS IT ANYWAY?  
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis engages the moral philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. The aim of this study is to render Nietzsche’s moral views in light of his rejection of utilitarianism and his conception of the self. The key point that I want to stress in my dissertation is that Nietzsche’s rejection of utilitarian moral schemas follows from his rejection of the traditional (Cartesian) view of the ego.

I will employ Herbert Spencer, a dominant intellectual authority in Nietzsche’s time, to set up a framework in which Nietzsche’s arguments against utilitarianism can be understood. To do this, the first chapter explore Spencer’s Data of Ethics, a work that figured largely in Nietzsche’s thought, if not in his published works. After presenting Nietzsche’s critique of Spencer in chapter 2 of this study presents the full battery of Nietzsche’s objections to utilitarianism in chapter 3.

This will lead Nietzsche’s conception of the self, which I will claim underlies his rejection of utilitarianism. I will attempt to phrase Nietzsche’s theory of the self as an arena of competing drives in chapter 4. In tracing out this line of argumentation I will profitably explore a number of Nietzsche’s central concepts. Most notably, this study will excavate Nietzsche’s idea will to power and the distinction between master and slave moralities. This will proceed from a close reading of Nietzsche’s earlier works, most importantly Human, all too Human and Daybreak.
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WS  The Wanderer and His Shadow, Part II of Human, All Too Human.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, references to Nietzsche’s texts will be placed within parenthesis throughout this study. The only exception is chapter 1, which focuses on Spencer’s Data of Ethics. In chapter 1, the page number of the quoted text as it occurs in Spencer’s Principles of Ethics, vol.1: The Data of Ethics will be placed in parenthesis.
METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Among the most clearly divisive issues in Nietzsche studies is the status of the unpublished notes from the Nachlass. Some commentators hold that a responsible investigation of Nietzsche’s thought ought to be sensitive to the difference between the texts he chose to publish, and those he did not. Others, Heidegger most prominently, argue that the ‘real Nietzsche’ can only be found in the Nachlass. More recently, there has emerged a variety of commentators that take both the published and the unpublished writings to be of equal value, on the grounds that in both cases there is no author.

This study belongs with those that make a distinction between those works of Nietzsche that were published by him and those that were not. Thus, it will make sparse use of the notes, relying mainly on passages from the published works and occasionally adducing notes only when they serve to elaborate some theme present in the published works.

One other note: Nietzsche often uses italics in his texts. All these have been faithfully reproduced and the author of this study has not accented any of the quoted material.
Nietzsche’s critique of Utilitarianism is far from the current academic ideal. For one, Nietzsche’s attack takes the form of abrasive remarks scattered throughout his corpus rather than a focused treatise. Nietzsche’s arguments often seem underdeveloped, unfinished, or just plain fallacious (especially the scathing \textit{ad hominem} attacks against English thinkers). Further, it is unclear what role this critique is meant to play in Nietzsche’s overall project especially as Nietzsche seems offer no positive account against which his critical remarks can be offset. This can lead to the belief that Nietzsche has no philosophically valuable criticisms of utilitarianism.

While Nietzsche does not have a scholarly treatise against utilitarianism, he offers numerous reasons to reject it. Nietzsche will argue that utilitarianism: 1. is inconsistent 2. rests on faulty or problematic metaphysical and psychological presuppositions (unified and transparent ego, freedom; disinterested altruism, pity) 3. based on the untenable premise that pleasure/pain are grounds for moral value 4. originates in \textit{slave morality} And 5. problematically unconditional (i.e. applies to all). Taken together, I believe these arguments give sufficient cause to reject utilitarianism. I will reconstruct what I take to be Nietzsche’s objections against utilitarianism. It must be stressed that my aim in this is not to refute utilitarianism with Nietzsche’s help, rather, it is exegetical: I wish to reconstruct how Nietzsche thought about this issue.

Nietzsche’s arguments against utilitarianism will be used as a gateway to understanding his views on the self and on value. I will begin by considering Nietzsche’s early arguments against utilitarianism. I will then contextualize these criticisms by reviewing the work of Herbert Spencer, one of the prominent utilitarians of his time. The reason I choose this thinker is that I believe that his was a major influence on Nietzsche’s thought although he is given almost no attention in Nietzsche studies today. After reviewing the work of Spencer, I zoom in
on the only full section Nietzsche devotes to Spencer before moving on to giving the full battery of Nietzsche’s arguments against deriving value from utility.

In this, I will survey the full breadth of Nietzsche’s work in order to present an adequate rendering of his attack on a dominant moral systems. After presenting Nietzsche’s arguments against utilitarianism, I will consider the possible responses open to a utilitarian in an attempt to reconstruct the dialectic between Nietzsche’s conception of value and that of a mainstream utilitarian. The main point of contention will be shown to be a disagreement on the nature of the ego.

This will lead me to Nietzsche’s problematization of the self, specifically, his theory of the self as a subjective multiplicity (or social structure) of drives and affects. In excavating the nuances of Nietzsche’s conception, I will probe book II Daybreak of one of his early texts.

The overarching methodological motivation of this dissertation is to excavate the underlying arguments that ground some of the key concepts Nietzsche’s thought. Specifically, I am looking to ground his notions of will to power and his distinction between slave morality and master morality through close consideration of his early works and the influences I believe to have provoked them.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation will delve into Spencer’s Data of Ethics. This work was hugely popular at the time Nietzsche was writing. According to recent scholarship,² the Data had a deep and lasting influence on Nietzsche’s thought. Chapter 2 will reconstruct Nietzsche response to Spencer. As Nietzsche was never explicit in his critical project to Spencer (and other thinkers), this section will attempt to bring to light what is at stake in Nietzsche’s critique of Spencer’s ethical system. Chapter 3 will reconstruct the more general arguments against utilitarianism in Nietzsche’s text. Chapter 4 will examine Nietzsche’s views on the self and explore the roots of Nietzsche’s notions of will to power, slave and master moralities.

² G Moore, 2002, J. Richardson, 2004
To my family, in gratitude that never finds words.
CHAPTER 1

THE SCIENTIFIC ETHICS OF H. SPENCER

In all “science of morals” so far one thing was lacking, strange as it may sound: the problem of morality itself; what was lacking was any suspicion that there was something problematic here. (BGE 186)

1.1 Introduction

Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903) is a thinker that figured largely in Nietzsche’s thought. Spencer is only rarely mentioned in Nietzsche’s published works, however he is referred to 36 times in Nietzsche’s unpublished notes; more than Darwin, and twice as much as Mill and Bentham combined. It is Spencer that Nietzsche reads as he develops familiarity with evolutionary thought, and not Darwin. Spencer was also a prominent utilitarian. Although Spencer espouses a somewhat unique brand of utilitarianism, his ethical project explicitly agrees with J.S. Mill’s greatest happiness principle.

When Nietzsche does mention Spencer in his published oeuvre, it is almost always in passing and is invariably contemptuous. However, I believe this masks a deep involvement with Spencer’s thought.

Herbert Spencer is rarely read today. He is considered the ‘father of Social Darwinism’ and coiner of the phrase ‘Survival of the fittest,’ aside from that though, little is remembered about this once widely read English thinker. In Nietzsche’s time Spencer was exceedingly popular in the English speaking world. Spencer ran in intellectual circles that included Darwin, Mill, and Sedgewick among others. He was an early proponent of Darwin (although there are fundamental differences between how he and the author of The Origin of the Species

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3 J. Richardson, 2004, p.16
4 This is a mainstay of what I shall refer to as mainstream utilitarianism in that it evaluates an action as right to the degree that it increases utility (pleasure or happiness) and wrong to the degree that it decreases utility, with the condition that “everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one”.

1
understood natural selection). Oddly, Spencer is remote figure even in discussions of Nietzsche. This is not a fact that has gone unnoticed by all recent scholarship. Moore, in *Nietzsche, Biology, and Metaphor* notes:

Spencer is rarely, if at all, mentioned in discussions of the development of Nietzsche’s thought. This is remarkable, because although Nietzsche restricts himself to only a few curt and dismissive remarks about Spencer in his published works, his notebooks reveal a long-running critical engagement with the British philosopher’s *Data of Ethics* (1879), a book which Nietzsche initially greeted with enthusiasm, even going so far as to urge his publisher Ernst Schmeitzner to acquire the German rights for its translation (KGB II 5, p. 466). That Nietzsche studied Spencer is certainly significant: for more than anyone else it was Spencer who was associated with the idea that evolution was an intrinsically moral force; it was he who advanced perhaps the most influential nineteenth-century system of evolutionary ethics.

Spencer devoted much of his life to the construction of a vast intellectual edifice he called *synthetic philosophy*. It would be helpful to summarize this in the fewest possible words: Spencer aimed to systematically develop an understanding of evolution through natural selection and apply this to sociology, psychology, and ethics. For Spencer, evolution through natural selection was a biological manifestation of a much greater, indeed cosmic, developmental process: matter organizing itself. Spencer finds that there is a universal tendency from incoherence and un-differentiation towards coherence and structural complexity which he calls ‘the principle of continuity’. Also, Spencer embraced the Lamarckian notion of acquired traits. Moore summarizes pithily Spencer’s view of morality: “The emergence of life was an inevitable consequence of the tendency for matter to organize itself, as was the increasing diversity and sophistication of biological forms evident in the gulf that separates the primitive amoeba from human beings. ... What he terms ‘morality’ is nothing but a particular

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5 Moore, 2002, p.61

6 A contemporary of Spencer writes: “In the six thousand pages of the Synthetic Philosophy there is not, in so dar as Spencer could achieve this end, a superfluous syllable - not to say word. It took Spencer forty years to write this wonderful condensation of knowledge; as the titles of the volumes indicate, they contain principles - special truths or simple facts - being nowhere included further than what is essential to firmly enable general truths.” (Alfred W. Tillett, *Spencer’s Synthetic Philosophy: What it is All About*, 1914)
instance of the incessant adaptation of internal relations to external relations which characterizes the universal process of Evolution”\textsuperscript{7}.

In the next section, I will explore The Data of Ethics (1879, of which Nietzsche owned a German translation which he annotated heavily\textsuperscript{8}) in some depth. This will provide my study with a quarry towards which I will aim Nietzsche’s objections to utilitarianism.

The numbers in brackets, in this chapter only, indicate the page number of the quotation as it occurs in Spencer’s Principles of Ethics, vol.1: The Data of Ethics

\section*{1.2 The Data of Ethics}

For Spencer, human behavior forms an “organic whole” (conduct) of which morality is concerned with but a part. “The whole of which Ethics forms a part, is the whole constituted by the theory of conduct in general; and this whole must be understood before the part can be understood” (5). Spencer begins with the idea that not all actions are morally relevant: eating a meal or opening a window to air the room are not looked upon as morally good or bad. It follows then that moral actions form only a part of actions in general. To better understand the nature moral actions, Spencer will investigate the whole of which these actions are a part.

Conduct, “scientifically conceived,” (6) is in fact “immensely wider in range than that just indicated. Complete comprehension of conduct is not to be obtained by contemplating he conduct of human beings only: we have to regard this as a part of universal conduct - conduct as exhibited by all living creatures. For evidently this comes within our definition - acts adjusted to ends” (6).

The rationale for this move constitutes Spencer’s organicism. To understand ethics, we need to understand it as part of a larger whole: human action. To understand human action, we must understand it as part of the actions of all animate beings. Spencer in fact goes even

\textsuperscript{7} G. Moore, 2002, footnote p. 63
\textsuperscript{8} G. Moore, 2002, p. 63
further: to understand the actions of all animate beings (now), we must “include in our conception the less-developed conduct out of which this has arisen in the course of time ... And this is tantamount to saying that our preparatory step must be to study the evolution of conduct” (7).

In elaborating his conception of this whole, Spencer begins with a (somewhat question-begging) negative definition: conduct is the aggregate all actions except “purposeless actions” (5). We are left to infer that for Spencer, conduct must be identical with purposeful action. Is purposeful action identifiable with free action? Spencer seems to imply as much in his phrase *adjustment of acts to ends*. “Conduct in its full acceptation must be taken as comprehending all adjustments of acts to ends, from the simplest to the most complex, whatever their special natures and whether considered separately or in their totality” (7).

This definition delineates the part of action which can meaningfully be called conduct. The parts of action that Spencer wants to leave out are “such actions as those of an epileptic in a fit”. However, Spencer does not really clarify why it follows from his definition that the convulsions of an epileptic must be discounted from conduct. Perhaps, in some sense, these actions *are* an adjustment of acts to ends.

More problematically, Spencer does not give a clear account of the criteria that determine which actions are like an epileptic seizure. Are we to understand purposeless actions as those that are biologically necessitated? This is, to be sure, a problematic definition. But Spencer’s earlier examples stand against such a reading. He cites actions like eating and warming oneself as parts of conduct. Later, Spencer will go further to include reproduction as a form of (altruistic) conduct.

The distinction between purposeless and purposeful action arises by degrees “during evolution” (10). His criteria are the functional complexity and coherence of action. Spencer draws a spectrum of conduct starting from the random movements of minute aquatic creatures,
which survive “only as long as the accidents of the environment are favorable” to the larger aquatic creatures in which “we see how, along with larger size, more developed structure, and greater power of combining functions, there goes an advance in conduct” (10). As we reach vertebrates, again we find that “with advance in structures and functions, [an] advance in conduct” (12).

In discussing the morality of conduct, Spencer notes “[It is] clear that the transition from indifferent acts to acts which are good or bad is gradual.” Spencer elaborates with examples. My decision to walk (alone) to the waterfall or to the sea shore is morally indifferent. Whereas if I am accompanied by a friend who has explored the sea shore but wishes to see the waterfall it is “no longer ethically indifferent” (6). If my friend has not the strength to arrive at the waterfall through the moor (there being an easier way to this waterfall through the wood), then the means to our destination is also no longer ethically indifferent. If making the trip could entail missing an appointment “of life-and-death importance, to self or others, the ethical character becomes pronounced” (6).

What constitutes, for Spencer, highly-evolved conduct? “What constitutes advance in the evolution of conduct, as we trace it up from the lowest type of living creatures the the highest? has already been answered by implication” (10). Spencer proposes to answer ethical questions through an examination of evolutionary concepts, i.e. ‘more highly evolved’ = morally superior. However, the crucial problem with this approach is that it invariably assumes evolution is inherently moral. This objection will be elaborated and discussed after completing our exploration of Spencer’s ethical project.

The strategy of setting up a sort of evolutionary spectrum of species and making ethical deductions based on its observation is repeated (ad nauseam) throughout the book. Spencer typically starts with a microscopic life form, moves up to fish or birds, and ends with a(n
ahistorical) comparison of savages - “lower forms of the highest form of life” - and ‘civilized man’, who, for Spencer, embodies the pinnacle of ethical conduct.

Spencer identifies highly evolved conduct by its effects, and in this he is straightforwardly utilitarian. After observing that as one moves from the less evolved to the more species on the proposed spectrum of life, Spencer notes that “the effect of this more highly-evolved conduct is to secure the balance of the organic actions throughout far longer periods” (13). In his characteristically convoluted style, Spencer is saying that the more highly evolved an organism is, the longer it lives. Spencer supplements this first criterion of longevity with a second he designates “quantity of life”. With this, Spencer seems to be referring to the functional complexity of an organism. He defines this concept by comparing oysters and cuttlefish, worms and insects, and the “more evolved with the less evolved among mankind” (14). Although it may live longer, an oyster's existence involves “less vital activities” (14). Similarly, despite being shorter lived, an insect “may experience a greater quantity of changes which constitute life” (14). Finally, compared to a “savage,” a civilized man’s “aggregate of thought, feeling and action” is incomparably greater. Spencer concludes with this simplistic formula and I feel it captures well the gist of Spencer’s project: “Hence, estimating life by multiplying its length into its breadth, we must say that the augmentation which accompanies the evolution of conduct results from increase of both factors” (14).

So for Spencer, highly evolved conduct has two aims, and is evaluated by how well these aims are fulfilled. The primary criterion is a long lifespan. The secondary criterion Spencer calls quantity of life. It involves the “sum of vital activities,”(15) the “aggregates of thought, feeling, and action” (15). (It is odd that Spencer tries to frame this second criterion quantitatively. His first criterion seems more straightforwardly quantitative while the second is markedly qualitative.)
So far, Spencer’s account of conduct surveyed actions whose final purpose concerns individual life. But it is evident that “self preservation in each generation has all along depended on the preservation of offspring the preceding generations” (15). This suggests consideration of actions whose final purpose concerns the “life of the species”. Spencer thus makes a distinction between self-maintaining and race-maintaining conduct. His concept of race-maintaining conduct seems to refer to procreation and child-rearing. Spencer doesn’t go into the details aside from his familiar move of comparing the putatively less evolved samples of humanity to their more highly evolved counterparts.

Unsurprisingly, the savage is found wanting when compared the civilized man in whom “the rearing of children become[s] far more elaborate, alike in the number of ends met, variety of means used, and efficiency of their adaptations; and the aid and oversight are continued throughout a much greater part of early life.”

We find Spencer’s quantitative/qualitative criteria at play here as well. Race-maintaining conduct is evaluated by its complexity and efficiency on the one hand, and its temporal duration on the other. So, the longer and more elaborate your care for your children is, the more evolved (and thus the more moral) it is. A charitable understanding of this will also include education in Spencer’s meaning.

Spencer finds that advancement in this new aspect of conduct is necessarily concomitant with advancement in the first. “That better organization that makes possible [further self-maintenance] which makes possible [further race maintenance] ... Speaking generally, neither can evolve without the evolution of the other; and the highest evolution of the two must be reached simultaneously” (16). It may be that the two criteria are inter-dependent, but Spencer does not show that this is necessarily the case.

Questing for a conception of conduct that is “perfectly evolved,” (16) Spencer finds a third aspect of conduct worthy of consideration. The fact of the struggle for existence implies
that “successful adjustments of acts made by one creature involves an unsuccessful adjustment by another creature.” For Spencer, this state of affairs (the ‘struggle for existence’) points “by antithesis” (18) to conduct that is perfectly evolved. A state in which no individual hinders another’s adjustments, but rather the conduct of all individuals harmonize to further the ends of all organic life. This is the meeting and melding of altruism and egoism, and the birthplace of Spencer’s absolute ethics.

To recap, Spencer has said this: To understand ethics, we must understand it as part of a larger whole: conduct, which in turn is a part of action (purposeful action). To understand action, and ethics in turn, we need to see it in the appropriate framework. Since all action comes from living creatures, and all living creatures are governed by evolution, to understand conduct, we must understand its evolution. In taking this view, we see that as conduct evolves it involves more (perfect) adjustments of means to ends. “Ethics has for its subject matter, that form which universal conduct assumes during the last stages of evolution” (20).

1.3 Spencer’s Hedonistic Utilitarianism

‘Utilitarianism’ is a term that designates a number of axiomatically similar moral doctrines. Mainstream utilitarianism draws largely from the two most prominent modern proponents of the theory, J. Bentham and J.S Mill. It is an ethically normative theory that holds that we ought to do the actions that produce the most utility (understood as pleasure, or happiness), with the condition that we treat all members of the community (ourselves included) as equally entitled to utility. Therefore, the good is understood in terms of utility, or happiness.

Straying from mainstream utilitarianism, Spencer goes on to explicitly identify good and highly evolved conduct: “The study of conduct in general and the evolution of conduct have prepared us to harmonize these interpretations ... That which the last chapter found to be
highly-evolved conduct is that which, in this chapter, we find to be what is called good conduct’ (24, 25). This is because the word ‘good’ is coextensive with ‘adapted to its end’.

It is worth noting that Spencer beings his investigation in the good on an etymological note. Spencer asks what we mean when we use the word in different contexts, like a good knife, a good jump, and a good billiards shot. His answer is that in all these cases, we mean the object is adapted to its ends. The reason we note this is that Nietzsche, in his major work on morality, The Genealogy, begins his investigation along the same etymological lines. However, Nietzsche’s approach is both broader and deeper as he does not limit himself to usage of the word in one language and one time, delving instead into ancient Greek, Latin, old Gaelic, German. Nietzsche may even be interpreted as acknowledging his debt to Spencer when he opens GoM I, 4 with: “I was given a pointer in the right direction by the question as to what the terms for ‘good’, as used in different languages, means from the etymological point of view”.

Since highly evolved organisms and conduct are adapted to their ends, we can infer that good conduct is one and the same with highly evolved conduct. This is because “the good is the universally pleasurable” (30). Spencer’s definition of pleasure is somewhat divergent from the common usage. The word ‘pleasure’ goes unmentioned in his text until Spencer investigates of the “assumption underlying all moral estimates” (26). This, curiously, turns out to be (an affirmative answer to) the question ‘Is life worth living?’

On the answer to this question depends entirely every decision concerning the goodness or badness of conduct. By those who think life is not a benefit but a misfortune, conduct which prolongs it is to be blamed rather than praised: the ending of an undesirable existence being the thing to be wished, that which causes the ending of it must be applauded; while actions furthering its continuance, either in self or other, must be reprobated. Those who, on the other hand, take and optimistic view, or who, if not pure optimists, yet hold that in life the
good exceeds the evil, are committed to opposite estimates; and must regard as conduct to be approved that which fosters life in self and others, and as conduct to be disapproved that which injures of endangers life in self or others (26).

The optimist and pessimist agree “that life is good or bad, according as it does, or does not, bring a surplus of agreeable feeling. ... whether the average consciousness rises above indifference-point into pleasurable feeling or falls below it into painful feeling. ... The implication common to their antagonist views is, that conduct should conduce to the preservation of the individual, of the family, and of the society, only supposing that life brings more happiness than misery. ... Thus there is no escape from the admission that in calling good the conduct which subserves life, and bad the conduct which hinders or destroys it, and in so implying that life is a blessing and not a curse, we are inevitably asserting that conduct is good or bad according as its total effects are pleasurable or painful” (26-27).

In this way, Spencer grounds his brand of utilitarianism on the premise that agreeable feeling is the ultimate criterion in deciding the value of life. To arrive at an understanding of how best to act, Spencer first investigates our usage of the term ‘good’ and finds it identical to ‘adapted to preserve the individual’. Moving from this conclusion, he asks under what conditions would we think it is ‘good’ to preserve life? Answer: when we think that life brings more of what is agreeable than is disagreeable.

Therefore, we find within Spencer’s concept of ‘good’ strong links to pleasure. This is Spencer’s biological deduction of hedonism. “No school can avoid taking for the ultimate moral aim a desirable state of feeling called by whatever name - gratification, enjoyment, happiness. Pleasure somewhere, at some time, to some being or beings, is an inexpugnable element of the conception. It is as much a necessary form of moral intuition as space is a necessary form of intellectual intuition [sic]” (46).

Spencer grounds his hedonism by positing a “primordial connexion” (51) between pleasure and survival: “On the one hand, setting out with the lowest living things, we see that
the beneficial act and the act which there is a tendency to perform are originally two sides of
the same; and cannot be disconnected without fatal results. On the other hand, if we
contemplate developed creatures as now existing, we see that each individual and species is
from day to day kept alive by the pursuit if the agreeable and avoidance of the disagreeable”
(55). Thus, pleasure is result of the exercise of faculties which further the preservation of the
individual. This makes paves the way for a hedonistic understanding of evolution.

We have seen that to admit the desirableness of conscious
existence, is to admit that conduct should be such as will
produce a consciousness which is desirable - a consciousness
which is as much pleasurable and as little painful as may be.
We have also see that this necessary implication corresponds
with the a priori inference, that the evolution of life has been
made possible only by the establishment of connexions
between pleasurable and beneficial actions and between pains
and detrimental actions. (150)

1.4 The Conciliation of Egoism and Altruism

That we take pleasure in organically beneficial behaviors is thus an a priori fact about
(the evolution of) life. Spencer then applies this understanding of evolution to the moral sphere.
There is an extended account of how pleasure comes to be attached with the feeling of
sympathy and to altruism (because of their survival enhancing value). As mentioned, Spencer
finds altruism in the act of reproduction\textsuperscript{12}.

From the case of altruism in unicellular life (in which reproduction actually involves
sacrifice of a piece of the organism), Spencer constructs a continuum of cases culminating in
the altruism of ‘civilized’ human beings: “As there has been an advance by degrees from
unconscious paternal altruism to conscious paternal altruism of the highest kind, so has there
been an advance by degrees from the altruism of the family to social altruism” (206). As

\textsuperscript{12} “Among creatures of higher grades ... parents bequeath parts of their bodies, more or less
organized, to form offspring at the cost of their own individualities” (Data, 230) In one of his
notes, Nietzsche explicitly rejects this claim “Quite false with Spencer to see in the care of the
brood and already in procreation an expression of the altruistic drive.” 9.1[110][1880]
evolution progresses (in a straightforwardly moral fashion, by Spencer’s lights) the pleasure we take in altruism will burgeon steadily until “sympathetic pleasures will be spontaneously pursued to the fullest extent advantageous to each and all” (250).

It is clear that there are significant differences between Spencer’s and mainstream utilitarianism and it is instructive to consider his own view of this difference. In a letter written to J.S. Mill, Spencer, in response to being called an “anti-utilitarian,” makes an interesting analogy:

During its early stages, planetary Astronomy consisted of nothing more than accumulated observations respecting the positions and motions of the sun and planets ... But the modern science of planetary Astronomy consists of deductions from the law of gravitation - deductions showing why the celestial bodies necessarily occupy certain places at certain times.

This relation between astronomy old and new reflects the difference between Mill’s utilitarianism, which is content to apply its utility calculations without investigating the causal mechanisms that necessitates the results, and Spencer’s. This is why Spencer often refers to his moral philosophy as “ethical science” (58). Spencer gains insight into the causal mechanisms undergirding mainstream utilitarianism from the study of evolution.

By defining pleasure as an evolutionary incentive, Spencer can predict which actions are beneficial by reference to a law: what is pleasurable = what is beneficial. This leads Spencer to some striking claims.

Consider, for example, Spencer’s notion of “absolutely right actions”. This is, again, explained through examples. These are a mother suckling her infant, and a father and son’s “frolics”. Both examples are meant to highlight cases in which the interaction is both pleasurable and useful to both parties. Notably, Spencer presents no examples of ‘absolutely right actions’ that are unrelated to parenting.

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13 For reasons unknown.
14 Correspondence with J.S. Mill, 1866
15 “Every science begins by accumulating observations, and presently generalizes these empirically; but only when it reaches the stage at which its empirical generalizations are included in a rational generalization, does it become developed science.” (Data, 61)
Or to take another example: “Remembering that in the course of organic evolution, the means to enjoyment themselves usually become sources of enjoyment; and that there is no for of action which may not through the development of appropriate structures become pleasurable; the inference must be that industrial activities carried on through voluntary co-operation, will in time acquire the character of absolute rightness as here conceived.” (263)

These are two examples of Spencer’s definition of pleasure as an evolutionary incentive leading him into making indefensible claims. While a mother suckling her infant may be a touching image of human beneficence, is it really plausible to hold that her action represents a moral summit? The case of a father playing with his son is even less convincing.

We may also pause for a moment and examine Spencer’s claim that ‘industrial activities will in time acquire the character of absolute rightness” as Spencer conceived it. Spencer’s conception of ‘absolute rightness’, as we have seen above, involves an action being both pleasurable and beneficial. So, for Spencer, the act of (say) working long hours in a factory will, at some point, become pleasurable. While Spencer may be forgiven for not knowing about the environmental side-effects of ‘industrial activity’ (and thus forgiven for thinking it purely beneficial), it is unclear to this reader how Spencer could believe that long hours of monotonous and repetitive (not to mention exhausting) factory work will inevitably become pleasurable to human beings as a species.

1.5 Conclusion

In closing this chapter, I wish to draw attention to the following passage, which is worth noting for several reasons. For one, it contains a sketch that bears a striking resemblance to a dichotomy that will occupy a central place in Nietzsche’s moral thought. Secondly, it crisply highlights what Nietzsche often refers to as ‘the lack of historical sense’ as well as provides a
suitable target for a number of other objections Nietzsche will put forward. It is also exemplary of Spencer’s preferred style of argumentation: suggestively worded examples.

Bounding out of bed after an unbroken sleep, singing or whistling as he dresses, coming down with beaming face ready to laugh on the smallest provocation, the healthy man of high power, conscious of past successes and by his energy, quickness, and resource, made confident in the future, enters on the day’s business not with repugnance but with gladness; and from hour to hour experiencing satisfaction from work effectually done, comes home with an abundant surplus of energy remaining for hours of relaxation. Far otherwise it is with one who is enfeebled. Already deficient, his energies are made more deficient by constant endeavors to execute tasks that prove beyond his strength, and by the resulting discouragement. Besides the depressing consciousness of the immediate future, there is the depressing consciousness of the remoter future, with its probability of accumulated difficulties and diminished ability to meet them. Hours of leisure which, rightly passed, bring pleasures that raise the tide of life and renew the powers of work, cannot be utilized: there is not vigor enough for enjoyments involving action, and lack of spirits prevents passive enjoyment from being entered upon with zest. In brief, life becomes a burden. Now if, as must be admitted, in a community composed of individuals like the first the happiness will be relatively great, while in one composed of individuals like the last there will be relatively little happiness, or rather much misery; it must be admitted that conduct causing the one result is good and conduct causing the other is bad (191).

Looking ahead to Nietzsche’s critique of Spencer, I will close this section with a quote in which William James gives his response to the moral worldview of the Data of Ethics:

The white-robed, harp-playing heaven of our sabbath-schools, and the lady-like, tea-table elysium represented in Mr. Spencer’s Data of Ethics, as the final consummation of progress, are simply on par in this respect - lubber-lands, pure and simple, one and all. We look upon them from this delicious mess of insanities and realities, strivings and deadnesses, hopes and fears, agonies and exaltations, which form our present state, and tedium vitae is the only sentiment they awake in our breast. To our crepuscular natures, born for the conflict, the Rembrandtesque Chiaroscuro, the shifting struggle of the sunbeam in the gloom, such pictures of light upon light are vacuous and expressionless, neither to be enjoyed or understood. If this be the whole fruit of our victory, we say: if generations of mankind suffered and laid down their lives; if prophets confessed and martyrs sang in the fire and all the sacred tears were shed for no other end than that a race of creatures of such unexampled insipidity should succeed, and protract in saecula saeculorum their contented and inoffensive lies, why, at such a rate, better lose than win the battle, or at all
events better ring down the curtain before the last act of the play, so that a business that began so importantly may be saved from so singularly flat a winding up (From The Dilemma of Determinism, 1884).

Like Nietzsche, James finds in Spencer’s ultimate moral desideratum, the attainment of absolute ethics, a revolting prospect. However, Nietzsche goes further than scorning the “unexampled insipidity” of Spencer’s vision. The crux of Nietzsche’s objection is that Spencer unquestioningly assumes that his conception of an ideally moral world is one that is universally appealing. In this, Spencer is unknowingly beholden to very particular view of morality and the moral prejudices of his time. Nietzsche argues that it is Spencer’s middling status in the order of rank that does not allow him to tackle, or indeed even grasp, higher problems such as the value of a particular morality, or the tension between the desire to see things in a certain way, and the desire for truth. Instead of aiming for truth, thinkers like Spencer aim to present the world in terms of the particular values of their time. Using terms from Clark & Dudrick’s discussion, these thinkers unwittingly sacrifice the drive to truth for the sake of the drive to value, that is, they aim to present the world in a manner that is compatible with their intuitions rather than present the world as it really is.\(^\text{16}\)

Embedded Nietzsche’s notion of the order of rank is a further obstacle that prevents Spencer from recognizing the flaws in his project. Spencer lacks the historical sense: this is how Nietzsche brands Spencer’s (and other psychologists/genealogists) inability to see beyond the moral prejudices of their age. Combining the notions of the order of rank and the tension between the drive to truth and the drive to value will lead us to consider the distinction Nietzsche makes between the scholar and the philosopher. This is a differentiation that is, as we shall see, both relevant to and elucidated by Nietzsche’s critique of Spencer.

\[^{16}\text{Clark & Dudrick, The Naturalisms of Beyond Good and Evil, from The Blackwell Companion to Nietzsche, 2006}\]
CHAPTER 2

NIETZSCHE’S RESPONSE TO SPENCER’S ETHICAL PROJECT

When one contradicts another opinion, and at the same time develops one’s own, continual consideration of that other opinion usually disturbs the natural posture of one’s own: it appears more deliberate, more rigorous, perhaps a little exaggerated (HatH 349).

2.1 Introduction

In light of how influential Spencer was at the time Nietzsche was writing, and the fact that both were concerned with giving naturalized accounts of morality, Nietzsche’s treatment of Spencer in his published writings is surprising. One finds no more than six\(^{17}\) mentions of Spencer in Nietzsche’s exoteric oeuvre; five of which are in passing.

However, as mentioned above, Moore finds Nietzsche’s “notebooks reveal a long-running critical engagement with the British philosopher’s *Data of Ethics* (1879), a book which Nietzsche initially greeted with enthusiasm”\(^{18}\). Richardson also finds that Nietzsche’s attention to Spencer is notable: “Herbert Spencer stands out in the attention Nietzsche pays him. While Nietzsche’s access to Darwin was mainly indirect, he read Spencer carefully, and key parts of his conception of English Darwinism come out of this study”\(^{19}\).

In the summer of 1877, Nietzsche writes his (quondam) friend Paul Rée a note in which he details his meeting with George C. Robertson, then editor of *Mind*. In this enthusiastic letter, he speaks of “all the great names of England - Darwin, Spencer, Taylor, etc.” and later calls

\(^{17}\) GoM, I, 3; GoM, I, 12; EH, Destiny, 4; TI, Skirmishes, 37; GS, 373; and BGE 253.

\(^{18}\) G. Moore, 2002, p.61

\(^{19}\) J. Richardson, 2004, p. 139
this “the only true philosophical [company] now available.” In 1879, Nietzsche even goes so far as to urge his publisher Ernst Schmeitzner to acquire the German rights for the translation of Spencer’s *Data of Ethics.*

However, things changed. In a note written in six years later, Nietzsche describes Spencer as a mixture of ‘petise and Darwinism.’ Clearly untouched by the public opinion of his time, Nietzsche becomes increasingly critical of Spencer’s ethics and its biological underpinnings. Spencer’s writings put Nietzsche in a position of direct confrontation with evolutionary theory, and it is my belief that several of Nietzsche’s core concepts (the *overman*, the *herd*, the *pathos of distance*) originate from his rejection of Spencer’s thought; moreover, from turning Spencerian concepts on their heads.

As chapter 3 of this study will show, Nietzsche rejects the central (utilitarian) claim of Spencer’s ethics: that the judgements ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are synonymous with ‘expedient’ and ‘inexpedient.’ However, his rejection of Spencer’s elaborate ethical edifice goes deeper than his refutations of utilitarianism and strikes at Spencer’s project holistically. Nietzsche’s critique of Spencer has two axes: the first turns on his distinction between the will to truth and the will to value, which, as we shall see is related to Nietzsche’s notion of ‘order of rank’ and his distinction between the scholar and the philosopher (most pronounced in part 6 of *Beyond Good and Evil*).

The second axis of the critique is his conception of ‘the historical sense’; (the lack of) which forms the nub of his objection to numerous thinkers of his day, not least of all Spencer.

Of all the sections that mention Spencer in Nietzsche’s work, none tackle his work in as much depth as section 373 from book V of *The Gay Science*. However, before we proceed with the analysis of that section, we must touch on a couple of ideas which that section relies upon.

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20 D. Johnson, 2010, p.17
21 J. Richardson, 2004, footnote p.14
So, the strategy for this chapter is to understand these Nietzschean ideas before proceeding with a reading of GS 373.

2.2 The Historical Sense

I will deal with Nietzsche’s notion of the historical sense first, as it is the more straightforward of the notions relevant to his critique of Spencer. That Nietzsche sets a special place for history in his writings is obvious. Throughout his career, Nietzsche produces works that draw from history to elucidate philosophical problems. Beginning with the essay On the uses and disadvantages of History for Life, Nietzsche defines what a genuine historian is, and prescribes the methods for the right use of history. Among his first major works, The Birth of Tragedy explores Greek tragedy in order to elucidate and justify an ethics of art. In The Genealogy, Nietzsche explores the historical conditions under which moral prejudices were formed in order to articulate an ethics of morality. Finally, in The Antichrist, Nietzsche excavates the origins of Buddhism, the law of Manu, and Christianity in order to formulate an ethics of religion.

It follows then that from his earliest to his latest writings, Nietzsche recurrently laments philosophers’ lack of the historical sense. In the opening lines of Human all to Human, we learn that “the family failing of all philosophers” (HatH, 2) is the lack of the historical sense. This lack is manifested in assuming that the current (moral, social, and psychological) character of mankind gives “the unalterable facts of mankind.” (HatH, 2) Nietzsche counters this tendency with his notion of the historical sense. “Everything has become: there are no eternal facts.” (HatH)²³

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²² From HatH 2 to TI III, 1
²³ This is at odds with what will later emerge as Nietzsche's typology of human beings. See for example BGE 260: “Wandering through the many subtler and coarser moralities which have so far been prevalent on earth, or still are prevalent, I found certain features that recurred regularly
One can render the philosophers’ flaw Nietzsche calls the lack of the historical sense as a tendency to project into other cultures and historical periods moral sensibilities from one’s own culture and time. (Extra-textual) examples of this could include labeling ancient Greek sexual attitudes as pedophiliac, condemning pre-Islamic female infanticide as inhumanely cruel, or seeing the the traditional Hindu caste system as damningly discriminatory. The obverse of this would be the ability to study and understand history without imposing modern cultural preconceptions. This seems to capture at least part of Nietzsche’s meaning.

As mentioned above, the lack of historical sense in other thinkers is the frequent object of Nietzsche’s lamentations. This flaw, according to Nietzsche, is what underlies the seeming radicality of his views, most relevantly to this study, his views on morality and psychology. To Nietzsche, his age’s lack of historical sense was a major obstacle to the understanding of his ideas. Nietzsche is explicit about this: “All psychology so far has got hung up on moral prejudices and fears: it has not dared to descend into the depths. To understand psychology, as I do, as morphology and doctrine of the development of will to power - nobody’s ideas have even come close to this.” (BGE 23) We shall examine Nietzsche’s psychological project at length in a subsequent chapter.

Nietzsche gives an architectural analogy to clarify this notion of the historical sense: “It is [the] ability to rapidly reconstruct such systems of ideas and sensations on any given occasion, as for example the impression of a temple on the basis of a few pillars and pieces of wall that chance to remain standing, that the historical sense consists.” (HatH, 274) In the same way a trained eye can intuit the architectural impact an edifice had (upon its completion) by looking at its dilapidated ruins, a philosopher with a keen historical sense can understand the

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*N's claims of there being no eternal facts seems to fly in the face of his (later) assertion of the existence of a supra-historical distinction between active and reactive types.
behavior of bygone cultures (as those belonging to them did) by reconstructing the relevant historical accounts in an unprejudiced manner.

Nietzsche’s historical philosophy rejects any motion that takes contemporary humanity as the basis of sweeping generalizations about morality. Saying ‘everything has become’ is tantamount to the claim that there can be no knowledge other than knowledge of appearances - that which (Kantian) transcendental philosophy relegates to secondary to true (transcendental) knowledge. Indeed, in one of his late texts, Nietzsche calls for doing away with the notion of appearances as well as it is a remnant of the the metaphysical distinction between the true and apparent world: “The true world - we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But No! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.” (TI, 4, 6)

If one abandons belief in ‘eternal facts,’ Nietzsche argues, then one no longer needs the notion of appearances. This move can be tied back into our notion of the historical sense. Earlier in *Twilight*, Nietzsche speaks of the idiosyncrasies of philosophers: “[T]heir lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their respect for a subject when they de-historicize it, sub specie aeterni - when they turn it into a mummy.” (TI, 3, 1)

The reasoning is that it is a lack of the historical sense that generates the spurious metaphysical distinction between the true and apparent world. Nietzsche therefore argues that this confusion (of relegating the apparent to the true world) arises, among philosophers, because of their partiality to concept mummies, i.e. insofar as ideas seems to yield an unchanging reality, a fixed world of being.

In his published texts, Nietzsche repeatedly lambasts moral philosophers for failing to properly contextualize themselves historically. In some sections, Nietzsche seems to be pointing directly at Spencer:

“Just because our moral philosophers knew the facts of morality only very approximately in arbitrary extracts or
accidental epitomes - for example, as the morality of their environment, their class, their church, the spirit of their time, their climate and part of the world - just because they were poorly informed and not even very curious about different peoples, times, and past ages - they never laid eyes on the real problems of morality: for these emerge only when we compare many moralities.” (BGE 186)

The historical sense, then, is the ability to reconstruct the valuation schemes that surround (foreign) behavior without seeking to impose prejudices from one’s own environment. It also includes acceptance of the (paradoxically eternal) fact that “there are no eternal facts.” This keeps one from setting too much stock in any morality that happens to be current. This understanding of the historical sense is vindicated (and linked to the notion of the order of rank which is discussed below) by an entry in one of Nietzsche’s 1885 notebooks:

“Most moral philosophers only present the order of rank that rules now; on the one hand, lack of historical sense, on the other they are themselves ruled by the morality which teaches that what is at present is eternally valid.” Notebook 35 [5]

2.3 The Order of Rank

The order of rank is among Nietzsche’s more complicated and controversial notions. I shall defer a detailed consideration of this idea, and be satisfied with a quick sketch which should be sufficient for our present purposes. The order of rank is embedded Nietzsche’s claim that the human species comprises a (supra-historical) multiplicity of types. Some types are more valuable (or higher) than others; it is the order of rank that hierarchizes these types and the pathos of distance that maintains this hierarchy. To a large extent, the notion captures Nietzsche’s reaction (one may even say overreaction) to the egalitarianism of his day.

The passages that best elucidates this notion can be found in part 9 of Beyond Good and Evil. In chapter 4, we shall look more closely at Nietzsche’s conception of the self and his thesis that it is composed of a rivalry of drives which seek to dominate one another by

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24 A puzzling and interesting question I will not be concerned with here is: How does Nietzsche square his insistence on there being no eternal truths with the veracity of his theory of types?
monopolizing a person’s means and attention. In light of this understanding of the ego, the order of rank can be deduced from the hierarchy of drives:

“Which group of sensations is aroused, expresses itself, and issues commands in a soul most quickly, is decisive for the whole order of rank of its values and ultimately determines its table of the goods. The values of a human being betray something of the structure of his soul and where it finds its conditions of life, its true need.” (BGE 268)

The relation between one’s morality and structure of their drives is decisive. Nietzsche argues that one’s morality - one’s table of goods - is what attests most clearly to the hierarchy in which their drives stand to one another.²⁵ Put plainly, the order of rank is an (anti-egalitarian) ordering of people, actions, and moralities that seems to be independent of human will. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche says: “what is right for someone absolutely cannot be right for someone else; that the requirement that there be a single morality for everyone is harmful precisely to the higher men; in short, that there is an order of rank between people, and between moralities as well.” (BGE 228) In this, there is already a direct objection to utilitarianism (and other universal moral systems): there are types of people, and that which is beneficial for one type is harmful for the other.

A good way to render what Nietzsche means by his notion of order of rank is to imagine it as a measure of a soul’s health; the healthiest souls are those of the highest rank. However, as pointed out earlier, this points a crucial tension in Nietzsche’s work: it contravenes his claims that the world lacks a permanent moral order, or ‘eternal facts’. This idea is captured crisply by P. Berkowitz when he writes that Nietzsche’s “view of human excellence and his conception of the fundamental character of the world are like two intimately related antagonists in a play who can never meet on stage because they are portrayed by the same actor.”²⁶

²⁵ See BGE 6
²⁶ P. Berkowitz, 1995, p.4
2.4 The Philosopher/Scholar Distinction

Bearing the title ‘We Scholars,’ part 6 of Beyond Good and Evil diagnoses and speaks an pattern Nietzsche finds emerging in modern academia; “an unseemly and harmful shift in the respective ranks of scholarship\textsuperscript{27} and philosophy” (BGE 204) This, Nietzsche claims, is an after-effect of the democratization of learning: having been freed from the yoke of theology, the scholar (or scientist) now seeks to go farther and emancipate herself from philosophy.

Even further, she “now aims with an excess of high spirits and a lack of understanding to lay down laws for philosophy and to play the “master” - what am I saying? the philosopher.” (BGE 204)

This attempt to reverse the order of authority (from the philosopher scientist) also arises from “the wretchedness of the most recent philosophy ... those hodgepodge philosophers who call themselves “philosophers of reality” or “positivists” ... they are all losers who have been brought back under the hegemony of science, after having desired more of themselves at some time without having had the right to this “more” and its responsibilities - and who now represent, in word and deed, honorably, resentfully, and vengefully, the unbelief in the masterly task and masterfulness of philosophy.” (BGE 204) Nietzsche offers us a third reason, all too familiar to philosophers of our time, for the putative reversal: “Science is flourishing today and her good conscience is written all over her face, while the level to which all modern philosophy has gradually sunk, this rest of philosophy today, invites mistrust and displeasure, if not mockery and pity.” (BGE 204)

Now that we have reviewed the conditions for the emergence of the distinction, we can now elaborate this distinction between philosopher and scholar. The scholar, the “scientific average man, always rather resembles an old maid.” (BGE 206) While respectable, he neither begets or gives birth. His type, despite being industrious, patient, and helpful, is neither noble,

\textsuperscript{27} Nietzsche uses the word \textit{Wissenschaft}, which is also sometimes translated as science.
nor is it authoritative and self-sufficient. Out of a sense intellectual impotence, the scholar embraces the objective spirit.

However, once cured of his self-contempt and pessimism, “the ideal scholar in whom the scientific instinct, after thousands of total and semi-failure, for once blossoms and blooms to the end, is certainly one of the most precious instruments there are; but he belongs in the hands of one more powerful.” (BGE 207) This brings us to the philosopher.

Of “these extraordinary furtherers of man” (BGE 212) Nietzsche demands a multitude of preconditions: one must have been “critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian and also poet and collector and traveler and solver of riddles and moralist and seer and “free spirit” and almost everything in order to pass through the whole range of human values and value feelings and to be able to see with may different eyes and consciences.”

But the preconditions are not the task of the philosopher; his task is to create values. If this doesn’t make the picture of the philosopher clear that’s because what a philosopher is “cannot be taught: one must “know” it, from experience - or one should have the pride not to know it.” (BGE 213) This brings us back to the order of rank:

“Ultimately, there is an order of rank among states of the soul, and the order of rank of problems accords with this. The highest problems repulse everyone mercilessly who dares approach them without being predestined for their solution by the height and power of his spirituality. ... Upon such carpets coarse feet may never step: the primeval law takes care of that; ... For every high world one must be born; or to speak more clearly, one must be cultivated for it: a right to philosophy - taking that word in its great sense - one has only by virtue of one’s origins; one’s ancestors; one’s “blood” decide here too.”

(BGE 213)

The primeval law guarantees that only those who belong to the higher echelons of the order of rank may understand and grapple with deeper (higher) problems. What is it that marks out those of a higher nature? Nietzsche is enigmatic, but a close reading of parts 6 to 9 of
Beyond Good and Evil reveal some of their characteristics: honesty, the historical sense, a higher pity, a good intellectual conscience, and spiritualized cruelty.28

2.5 Conclusion

Now that we have a firm grip on Nietzsche’s notions of the order of rank, the distinction between the scholar and the philosopher, and the historical sense, we are ready to tackle section 373 of The Gay Science:

“Science” as a prejudice. - It follows from the laws of the order of rank that scholars, insofar as they belong to the spiritual middle class, can never catch sight of the really great problems and question marks; moreover, their courage and their eyes simply do not reach that far - and above all, their needs which led them to become scholars in the first place, their inmost assumptions and desires that things might be such and such, their fears and hopes all come to rest and are satisfied too soon. Take, for example, that pedantic Englishman, Herbert Spencer. What makes him “enthuse” in his way and then leads him to draw a line of hope, a horizon of desirability - that eventual reconciliation of “egoism and altruism” about which he raves - almost nauseates the likes of us; a human race that adopted such Spencerian perspectives as its ultimate perspectives would seem to us worthy of annihilation! But the mere fact that he had to experience as his highest hope something that to others appears and may appear only as a disgusting possibility poses a question mark that Spencer would have been incapable of foreseeing. (GS 373)

The section lays two objections against Spencer. The first is the cutting claim that thinkers of his caliber are unable to touch on the “really great problems and question marks.” The second objection is that it is simply untrue that egoism and altruism will come to be reconciled through evolution. Nietzsche’s rationale for making the second objection will be explored in more depth in the following chapter; this section will flesh out Nietzsche’s first objection.

28 BGE 214, 227, 230
Having already touched on the divide between the scholar and the philosopher, we are in a position now to articulate what the “really great problems and question marks” that the former are barred from are.

What marks a philosopher for Nietzsche is his task, the task of creating values. The scholar, on the other hand, is “accustomed to submit before whatever wants to be known.” (BGE 207) That is, the scholar, laden with value-commitments seeks to find true whatever is compatible with these commitments. This is why “their fears and hopes all come to rest and are satisfied too soon:” as soon as their value commitments are met, they believe they have arrived at truth.

Having searched for truth through the lens of his value commitments, Spencer is blind to the possibility that appears to him as true appears to others “only as a disgusting possibility.” Spencer believes his evaluation of empirical evidence is uncolored. Nietzsche holds that this is untrue, rather, it is Spencer’s commitments to a specific set of moral prejudices that animate his understanding of evolution. This is why Spencer (repeatedly) finds that the group of people he considers morally desirable (i.e. “civilized man”) to be also evolutionarily superior.

This blunder is also a sign a Spencer’s lack of historical sense. Had Spencer had a more discerning grasp of his (and his culture’s) situation in history, Nietzsche claims, he would have been more likely to see that his conception of what is morally desirable is only one conception among many, and would thus be more reserved about making bold claims concerning the moral nature of evolution through natural selection.
CHAPTER 3

NIETZSCHE’S CRITIQUE OF UTILITARIANISM

You utilitarians, you, too, love everything useful only as a vehicle for your inclinations. (BGE 174)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the full breadth of Nietzsche published corpus in order to distill his main arguments against utilitarianism as a moral position. Nietzsche’s approaches are varied. One objection vilifies the origins of utilitarian thinking, tying it to reprehensible (albeit widespread) error of reasoning.

In another objection, Nietzsche explores the metaphysical presuppositions that a utilitarian must hold and shows that these assumptions are incoherent and untenable. His third objection to utilitarianism demonstrates that utilitarianism fails its own requirements, i.e., is self-defeating.

The fourth objection is that utilitarianism undermines the position of the elite of a society. This objection will be elaborated, but it is necessary to stress that a deep, overriding concern for the luck few (be they called free spirits, philosophers of the future, or precursors of the overman) is one of the central motifs of Nietzsche’s moral philosophy.

The fifth objection is linked to the theory of evolution by natural selection, and this is relevant to this study because Darwin’s theory was a central tenet of Spencer’s philosophy, and many utilitarians of the time were concerned with synchronizing their moral views with what was rapidly becoming the central idea of biology. Nietzsche aims to show that utilitarianism in incompatible with evolution by natural selection.

The final objection is that utilitarian calculations are untenable. This is due to Nietzsche’s view on the self, which will be articulated in the following chapter.
3.2 ‘Shameful Origins’ - *Daybreak 102*

In a crucial section from *Daybreak*, Nietzsche lays out the “pudenda origo” (D 102) of all moral evaluations. The origin of *all* morality lies in a threefold error. Essentially a thesis on action, D 102 postulates that when we react to another who is in our presence we: 1. Base our reaction solely on the effect the other’s behavior has on us. 2. interpret this effect as the intention behind the behavior. 3. ascribe permanence to these intentions and on that basis call the other harmful or useful. Nietzsche elaborates:

*The oldest moral judgments.* - What really are our reactions to the behavior of someone in our presence? - First of all, we see what there is in it for *us* - we regard it only from this point of view. We take *this* effect as the *intention* behind the behavior - and finally we ascribe the harboring of such intentions as a *permanent* quality of the person whose behavior we are observing and thenceforth call him, for instance, ‘a harmful person.’ Threefold error! Threefold primeval blunder! Perhaps inherited from the animals and their power of judgement! Is the *origin of all morality* not to be sought in the detestable petty conclusions: ‘what harms *me* is something *evil* (harmful in itself); what is useful *to me* is something *good* (beneficent in itself); what harms me *once or several times* is the friendly as such and in itself’. *O pudenda origo!* Does that not mean; to imagine that the paltry, occasional, chance relationship of another with ourself is his *essence* and most essential being, and to assert that with the whole world and with himself he is capable only of those relationships we have experienced with him once or several times? And does there not repose behind this folly the most immodest of all secret thoughts: that, because good and evil are measured according to our reaction, we ourselves must constitute the principle of the good? - (D 102)

An interpretation of morality grounded on utility (whether present, or long forgotten) finds the source of morality *in the recipient of utility*. This point is important enough to merit hazarding an extratextual example. If Samar were to shove me out of her way on a busy street, I would first feel something disagreeable; indignation possibly, perhaps I would feel insulted as well. Then, I’ll presume that it was Samar’s (freely chosen) intention all along to produce this
feeling in me; she shoved me to insult me (rather than believing it was an accident or done to save time). Finally, I take this to be a permanent feature of Samar; so, if I were to run into her years later, my first thought would be: ‘That's the bully!’

A moral evaluation of a person (like the one above) must ultimately rely on judgements which have as their basis either one or several interactions with them. What is the time it takes to form a moral judgement compared to a person’s lifetime? Better put, what is the set of a person’s actions that we see compared to the set we don’t see? This is one part of the threefold error. The second part is that we assume that the set of actions that we see and the set of action we don’t are necessarily homogeneous. This is why we attribute permanence to the behavior of people around us.

This is the second part of the threefold error in moral reasoning Nietzsche points to in D 102. I see Samar’s action: This action brings about a change in me. But I attribute my feeling to something behind her action. In this vein, Nietzsche asks what our impressions of our neighbor really amount to: “We understand nothing of him except the change in us of which he is the cause - our knowledge of him is like hollow space which has been shaped” (D 118).

The third part of the threefold error which lies at the ‘shameful’ origin of morality is in the fact that we take the effect of the other on ourself to be the grounds of our moral evaluation of the other. We never actually experience another person at all, all that we experience is the impression that person leaves on us. And that impression is all we have to go by when we make a moral judgement. The ‘shamefulness’ of this evaluation lies in our readiness to generalize what is in reality a limited and particular perspective. We thus take what is at bottom knowledge of ourselves as knowledge of others.

“World of phantoms in which we live! Inverted, upsidedown, empty world, yet dreamed of as full and upright!” (D 118)

3.3 Parallels to The Genealogy
We shall have cause to revisit this early account of the origin of moral evaluation; for now, let us note that it resonates vividly with Nietzsche’s account of slave morality given in his later works, most notably, in the Genealogy. Slave morality stems from ressentiment, a word Nietzsche takes from French. The essential characteristic Nietzsche ascribes to slave morality is that it passively experiences the external world. It needs to be acted upon before being able to formulate a judgement.

However, that is not to say that Nietzsche’s account of the origin morality in Daybreak is continuous with that of the slave morality in The Genealogy, only that it is to some extent indicative of it. At this point, Nietzsche has yet to fully develop the dichotomy between master and slave morality, a dichotomy to which this section is surely germinal. The basic mechanism of ressentiment, in which one takes the effect of the other as the other’s essence is crucial for a proper understanding of the interplay between the slave and master types. What is lacking, however, is the crucial confrontation in which the nobles, those exemplars of human flourishing, furnish the threatening external world to which slave morality says ‘No’ and afterwards affirms itself.

As a digression, it is worth noting Daybreak has another section concerned with a pudenda origo. This section also points to (and is mentioned in) the Genealogy. Section 42, titled The Origin of vita contemplativa, traces the origin of the contemplative man to weariness, decline, and melancholy. In line with Nietzsche’s descriptions of the origin of the philosopher in the ascetic priest in chapter III of The Genealogy, the first contemplator was an individual experiencing a decline in his physical power and (consequently) a dearth of desire. In ceasing

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29 Intensive prefix ‘re’ and ‘sentir’ which means to feel.
30 The first glimpse of the dichotomy between master and slave moralities in Nietzsche’s works is found in the work directly preceding Daybreak, Human all too Human, section 45, Nietzsche sketches the contrast between the morality of “ruling tribes and casts” which considers good “[h]e who has the power to requite, good with good, evil with evil, and also actually practic[e] requital” and bad “one who belongs to the ‘bad’, to a swarm of subject, powerless people who have no sense of belonging together.” Nietzsche cites this section in his preface to the Genealogy.
action, the archetypical contemplator vents his moods through words and thought. “In this condition

he becomes thinker and prophet, or he expands imaginatively on his superstition and devises new usages, or he mocks his enemies - but whatever he may think about, all the products of his thinking are bound to reflect the condition he is in, which is one in which fear and weariness are on the increase and his valuation of action and active enjoyment on the decrease; the content of these poetical, thoughtful, priestly moods; unfavorable judgement is bound to predominate. Later on, all those who acted as the single individual had formerly acted while in this condition, and who thus judged unfavorably and whose lives were melancholy and poor in deeds, came to be called poets or thinkers or priests or medicine men - because they were so inactive one would have liked to have despised such men and ejected them from the community; but there was some danger attached to that - they were versed in superstition and on the scent of divine forces, one never doubted that they commanded unknown sources of power. This is the estimation under which the oldest race of contemplative natures lived - despised to just the extent they were not dreaded! (D 42)

This captures a large part of the ascetic priest’s roots as described in GoM III, however, there are a number of differences that separate the archetypical contemplator of The Daybreak from the Genealogy’s ascetic priest. Similarities first. The ascetic priest, like the archetypical contemplator, “strives for an optimum of favorable condition under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power.” (GoM, III, 7) Both the priest and the contemplator turn away from action and deeds; whether their reasons for doing so are similar is unclear, but both seek to “compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge,” (GoM, I, 10) i.e., that of vile words and negative thoughts. Lastly, both contemplator and priest knew how to arouse fear in their fellow man and also, in themselves: “The earliest philosopher knew how to endow their existence with and appearance with a meaning, a basis and background, though which others might come to fear them: more closely considered, they did so from an even more fundamental need, namely, so as to fear and reverence themselves. For they found all the value
judgements within them turned against them, they had to fight down every kind of suspicion and resistance against “the philosopher in them” (GoM, III, 10).

Again, we find the *Daybreak* giving the outlines of the account the *Genealogy* fleshes out. But again, the accounts given by the early Nietzsche and the mature Nietzsche are not perfectly continuous. In the *Daybreak*, the archetypical contemplator is seen as a sort of perversion or degeneration of nature. It is only upon reaching a state which renders him unfit for action, through age or injury perhaps, that the contemplator turns away from deeds. In this, he is depicted as an exception. Rather than accepting death or ostracism for no longer being able to pull his own weight, the archetypical contemplator resorts to manipulation through fear and superstition.

While this is very similar to what the ascetic priest of the genealogy does, the acetic priest is recognized as part of a movement that defines us as a species: “For consider how regularly and universally the ascetic priest appears in almost every age. ... What does this mean? So monstrous a mode of valuation stands inscribed in the history of mankind not as an exception, and curiosity, but as one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena” (GoM, III, 11).

In the third essay of *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche does more than flag the odd, self-contradictory origin of thought. He investigates the origins of ascetic priest in remarkable depth. Instead of simply declaring it a case *pudenda origo* and moving on to other things,

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31 This last sentence, in my opinion, is a valuable clue to understanding the enigmatic first sentence of the Genealogy: “We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge - and with good reason.”

Had the original ‘man of knowledge’, the ascetic priest, known himself as he really was (that is, a symptom of degeneration, an inimical, powerless, and fraudulent parasite) he would have surely rejected himself and abrogated his commitment to “knowledge.” This is why Nietzsche says, in section 9 of GoM III, “that if a philosopher had been conscious of what he was, he would have compelled to feel himself the embodiment of “nitimur in vetitum” [desiring the forbidden] - and consequently guarded against “feeling himself,” against becoming conscious of himself.”

Self knowledge was forbidden to the earliest philosophers because “philosophy began as all good things begin ... All good things were formerly bad things; every original sin has turned into an original virtue” (GoM, III, 9) This is one of the central lessons of the third essay.
Nietzsche quests for an evolutionary understanding of the ascetic priest. Given that this “life-inimical” species, that does not “breed and propagate his mode of valuation through heredity,” is so pervasive in history, “it must indeed be in the interest of life itself that such a self-contradictory type does not die out”. Notice however, that in speaking for “the interest of life itself”, Nietzsche contradicts his own previous criticisms of Spencer’s identification of the interest of life with goodness or morality.

### 3.4 Error and Illusion in Morality

A different route to criticizing morality in Nietzsche’s early texts is showing that the time’s prevalent moral outlook rests on grounds that had ceased to be plausible. Morality as it then stood was characterized by certain descriptive assumptions about human agency. Specifically, the prevalent moral stance regards its agent as essentially free and autonomous. Nietzsche flatly rejects this.

However, we must point out that it is not necessarily the case that utilitarianism, the dominant normative system in Nietzsche’s time, requires a free agent. There are more nuanced versions of utilitarianism, and it is possible to value human happiness (under some description) while at the same time being a hard determinist. Nietzsche does not consider such nuances in his work and neither shall this study.

Nietzsche asks why it is that we never call harmful natural forces immoral, but do in the case of harmful men. Answer: “Because in the latter case we assume a voluntarily commanding

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32 This, as I hope to argue elsewhere, is a good example of Spencer’s influence on Nietzsche.
33 This can be summarized through Nietzsche’s analysis of “what is essentially involved in every action:

I know what I want, what I have done, I am free and responsible for it, I hold other responsible, I can call by its name every moral possibility and every inner motion which precedes action; you may act as you will - in this matter I understand myself and understand you all!” (D 116)

We shall return to this section in a later chapter.
free will, in the former necessity.” (HatH 102) Nietzsche gives an insightful depiction of how we fall into a similar error in a nearby section titled By the Waterfall: “we think we see in the countless curvings, twistings and breakings of the waves capriciousness and freedom of will; but everything here is necessary, every motion mathematically calculable” (HatH 106).

It is this illusion that causes in us a feeling of moral indignation upon seeing an ‘evil’ action and not the academic abstractions put forth by utilitarians: “‘Procuring pain as such’ does not exist, except in the brains of philosophers, neither does ‘procuring pleasure as such’ ... The evil acts at which we are most indignant rest on the error that he who perpetrates them against us possesses free will, that is to say, that he could have chosen not to cause us this harm”’ (HatH 99). Nietzsche will go further. “[W]e do not even call intentional harming immoral under all circumstances. ... All morality allows the intentional causing of harm in the case of self-defense: that is, when it is a matter of self-preservation” (HatH 102).

This relatively uncontroversial claim is coupled with a second: “Without pleasure, no life; the struggle for pleasure is the struggle for life” (HatH 104). This ought not be understood as a call for hedonism, rather, I find that this claim foreshadows Nietzsche’s notion of will to power34. This interpretation is lent force when we consider the sort of pleasure Nietzsche gives in his examples: pleasure obtained by teasing someone, breaking branches, or fighting wild animals. It is a pleasure in the awareness of one’s strength or one’s superiority. In a word, one’s power.

This feeling of one’s power can be achieved through the suffering of others. Nietzsche closes this crucial section: “Whether an individual pursues this struggle in such a way that people call him good, or in such a way that they call him evil, is determined by the degree and quality of his intellect” (HatH 104). Nietzsche claims that we are all in this struggle for pleasure/power. What differentiates the good from the evil among us is their ability to adhere

34 Cf. BGE 13 (among many, many others): “life is will to power.”
to a continually changing moral order: “Degrees of intelligent judgment decide whither each person will let his desire draw him; every society, every individual always has present an order of rank of things considered good, according to which he determines his own actions and judges those of others” (HatH 107).

That is, those among us who are called ‘good’ are simply the ones who have managed their inclination for pleasure so that it does not clash with that which is taken as good. If the struggle for pleasure is indeed the struggle for life, then taking steps to ensure or augment one’s pleasure becomes tantamount to self-preservation. And if self-preservation is morally acceptable (even when it means harming others) as must be making others suffer in order to “become aware of our strength” (HatH 103).

The augmented argument may be read as follows: We are all motivated solely and inexorably “self-enjoyment (together with the fear of losing it)” (HatH 107). Since this is the condition for all, the struggle for life is the struggle for self-enjoyment. Thus, attaining this pleasure, even if it is at the expense of others, is akin to self-preservation. This means that intentional harming of others (when done for the sake of becoming aware of one’s own strength) is like self-defense, and thus morally defensible.

The main point I want to highlight in this section is that morality for Nietzsche suffers from several egregious errors. So far, we have glimpsed Nietzsche’s problematization of moral judgment, and his rejection of a free and self-causing will as metaphysically naive. Already, he has put forward a positive theory, albeit loose and ambiguously phrased, Nietzsche’s comments on the on the linkages between pleasure, power, and suffering are the seeds for his most central and misunderstood idea: the will to power.

More relevantly, Nietzsche has pointed to an inconsistency lying at the heart of the most widely prevalent mode of moral thought at his time (i.e. utilitarianism). He first points to an instance in which these errors have lead utilitarians into inconsistency (harm is immoral, yet
natural disasters - the most ‘harmful’ events imaginable - are neither moral or immoral).

Nietzsche then shows how natural it is to fall into similar errors: just go look at a waterfall: you may feel the flow is *whimsical, playful*, or some other thing that is evocative of freedom; you may feel this even though you *know* that it is not. This is meant to be analogous to seeing a person in action and believing he is free, Nietzsche holds this to be the basic flaw in the prevalent moral outlook of his time.

### 3.5 Utilitarianism is Self-defeating

> How little you know of human happiness, you comfortable and benevolent people, for happiness and unhappiness are sisters and even twins that either grow up together or, as in your case, remain small together. (GS, 338)

Utilitarianism is the moral doctrine that an action is *right* to the degree that it maximizes pleasure while minimizing pain. Nietzsche finds these desiderata contradictory and based on a superficial understanding of human psychology. Happiness and unhappiness are inextricably bound, so that one cannot minimize one without minimizing the other and vice versa. This can be taken as two claims.

The claim is that utilitarians misunderstand human happiness if they seek to maximize it by minimizing collective suffering. This is an avenue on which Nietzsche is frequently misunderstood: Nietzsche often emphasizes the value of suffering, and this can make him seem callous on a superficial reading.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, the sentiment is echoed and suffering is said to be behind “all enhancements of man so far” (BGE 225). To those who seek to ameliorate the world’s anguish, Nietzsche says: “Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into sand? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections?” (D 174)
Obviously, interpreting Nietzsche’s statements as an invitation to violence is sophomoric. “It goes without saying that I do not deny - unless I am a fool - that many actions called immoral ought be avoided and resisted,” (D 103) rather, Nietzsche is pointing at an inconsistency in his opponent’s position: what the utilitarian thinks is harmful may really be useful.

Consider the following passage from *The Gay Science*:

Our “benefactors” are more than our enemies, people who make our worth and will smaller. When people try to benefit someone in distress, the intellectual frivolity which those moved by pity assume the role of fate is for the most part outrageous; one simply knows nothing of the whole inner sequences and intricacies that are distress for me or for you. The entire economy of my soul and the balance effected by ‘misfortune’, the breaking open of new springs and needs, the healing of old wounds, the shedding of entire periods of the past - all such things that can be involved in misfortune do not concern the dear compassionate one: they want to help and have no thought that there is a personal necessity of misfortune; that terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights, adventures, risks, and blunders are as necessary for me and you as their opposites; indeed, to express myself mystically35, that the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell. (GS 338)

The utilitarian never considers that suffering (disutility) is an essential part of the human experience. That only through suffering (even error36) can one reach certain states of well being. The utilitarian who seeks to minimize what he sees as another’s suffering may be ultimately doing the other an indelible disservice which will prevent the latter from attaining his full happiness.

In the opening lines of *The Gay Science* we read a statement clearly aimed at utilitarian moral evaluations:

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35 ‘Mysterically’ because this idea is linked, for Nietzsche, to the (Hindu) story of King Vishvamitra. See GoM, III, 10 and D 113.
36 TGS 307: “Now something that you formerly loved as a truth strikes you as an error; you shed it and fancy that this represents a victory for your reason. But perhaps this error was necessary for you then ... We negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm - something we do not know or see as yet.” Also importantly, see BGE 4: “The falseness of a judgement is not for us necessarily an objection to a judgment...”
It is easy enough to divide our neighbors quickly, with the usual myopia, from a mere five paces away, into useful and harmful, good and evil men; but in any large scale accounting, when we reflect on the whole a little longer, we become suspicious of this neat division and finally abandon it. Even the most harmful man may really be the most useful when it comes to the preservation of the species; for he nurtures either in himself or in others, through his effects, instincts without which humanity would long have become feeble or rotten.

(GS, 1)

In this there is an invitation to deeper reflection on utilitarian criteria of useful and harmful. What is really useful in the long run? Is it not possible that we are shortsighted? That some of what we take now as harmful be useful in the long run?

**3.6 Daybreak 108: A Few Theses**

This section is central to Nietzsche’s argument against utilitarianism in particular, and universal moral systems in general. The accents in the section are in the original text and provide valuable exegetical insights. Also, it is worth noting that Nietzsche uses quotes to indicate rival formulations; so I take the terms ‘moral’, ‘happiness and welfare of mankind’, and ‘highest happiness’ to point to the utilitarian position (the last term possibly to Spencer’s conception of the ‘absolute ethics’ in particular).

Insofar as the individual is seeking happiness, one ought not to tender him any prescriptions as to the path to happiness: for individual happiness springs from one’s own unknown laws, and prescriptions from without can only obstruct and hinder it. - The prescriptions called ‘moral’ are in truth directed against individuals and are in no way aimed at promoting happiness. They have just as little to do with the ‘happiness and welfare of mankind’ - a phrase to which it is in any case impossible to attach any distinct concepts, let alone employ them as guiding stars on the dark ocean of moral aspirations. - It is not true, as prejudice would have it, that morality is more favorable to the evolution of reason than immorality is. - It is not true that the unconscious goal in the evolution of every conscious being (animal, man, mankind, etc) is its ‘highest happiness’: the case on the contrary, is that every stage of evolution possesses a special and incomparable happiness neither higher nor lower but simply its own. Evolution does not have happiness is view, but evolution and nothing else. - Only if mankind possessed a universally recognized goal would it be possible to propose ‘thus and thus is the right course of action’: for the present
there exists no such goal. It is thus irrational and trivial to impose the demands of morality on mankind. - To recommend a goal to mankind is something quite different: the goal is then thought of as something which lies in our own discretion; supposing the recommendation appealed to mankind, it could in pursuit of it also impose upon itself a moral law, likewise at its own discretion. But up to now the moral law has been supposed to stand above our own likes and dislikes: one did not want actually to impose this law upon oneself, one wanted to take it from somewhere or discover it somewhere or have it commanded to one from somewhere. (D 108)

For our purposes, it would be helpful to break this section into parts, using Nietzsche’s hyphenation as our guide. In the first part, Nietzsche tells us that individuals seeking happiness should not be tendered any prescriptions as to the path to happiness: “for individual happiness springs from one’s own unknown laws.” Given the individuality and unknowability of the laws governing happiness, Nietzsche thinks that the concept of collective happiness is absurd, let alone unworthy of being our ultimate moral desideratum.

Nietzsche employs a characteristic argumentative move. He depicts the conditions in which the rival view would be correct to show that in our condition it finds no application. Thus, Nietzsche writes: “Only if mankind possessed a universally recognized goal would it be possible to propose ‘thus and thus is the right course of action’: for the present there exists no such goal.” This is an enlargement of the objection made in the first part of the section. In the same way that individual happiness is unknown, our universal goal (as mankind) is unknown.

Nietzsche’s objection is that utility, be it individual or collective, is unattainable since it is unknowable. This section focuses on collective utility and argues that since no overall consensus can be reached, the notion of general utility is empty. In chapter 4, we shall see Nietzsche make a similar move towards undermining the notion of individual utility by problematizing individuality. In short, Nietzsche will argue that since the self is not unity but comprised of a multiplicity of clashing drives, there will always be a dynamic multiplicity of things that constitute one’s utility. We shall elaborate this idea further below.
To return to D 108, Nietzsche finds that the imposition of a moral law on an individual is a hindrance to happiness while imposing it on mankind irrational. This implies a couple of objections that reach beyond utilitarianism to every universal moral system (especially Kantian ethics, which takes rationality to be the basis of morality\(^{37}\)). Nietzsche’s attack universal systems is one of the central motifs of his moral philosophy. It forms a central strand of his objections to Christianity (“gross answers”, EH), contemporary psychology (“lack of historical sense” HatH, GoM), and, of course, Utilitarianism. This connects to another central motif in Nietzsche: his concern for exceptional natures - “higher types” vs. “common types.”\(^{38}\)

In demanding application too all, utilitarianism (and deontic ethics) undermines the essential individuality of the higher type. This is what is behind Nietzsche’s claim that “prescriptions called ‘moral’ are in truth directed against individuals.” Conceptually, a universal system does not see individual dispositions, rather it sees an abstract subject which is taken to have certain characteristics (the desire to maximize utility, duties generated by practical reason).

For Nietzsche, value lies in the precarious few who are great. Famously, Nietzsche says in BGE 126: “A people is nature’s roundabout way of getting six or seven great men.” What grounds Nietzsche’s views on value will be discussed in detail later. However, at this point it is clear that a system that treats the elite few like everyone else is deeply objectionable to Nietzsche for just that reason. Therefore, a moral system that is egalitarian is rejected by Nietzsche.

The second part of this objection involves Nietzsche’s rejection of unconditional moral systems on the grounds that they are irrational. Remember the words of Zarathustra:

> A tablet of the good hangs over every people ... A thousand goals have there been so far, for there have been a thousand peoples. Only the fetters for a thousand necks are still missing, the one goal is still missing. Humanity still has no goal.

\(^{37}\) For a (slightly) deeper criticism of Kantian ethics, the reader is directed towards GS 335.

\(^{38}\) See GS 3: “What distinguishes the common type is that it never loses sight of advantage”
But tell me my brothers, if humanity still lacks a goal - is humanity itself not still lacking too? (Z, I, 15)

As indicated, imposing one moral system on mankind as a whole is only rational if mankind explicitly embraces a goal “at its own discretion.” Since mankind is a multiplicity of peoples with differing moral intuitions, thinking it possible (or desirable) to shoehorn these widely varying world-views under one moral rubric is a case in point of what Nietzsche calls the lack of historical sense.

Also, we find a couple of interesting similarities between the sections cited from Zarathustra and Daybreak. First, there is an understated edict to prescribe a goal to humanity in both sections. In Daybreak, Nietzsche is more delicate in wording his suggestion. Nietzsche dresses the idea of a collective goal in the gentlest of terms; its a recommendation which (on hopes) would appeal to mankind. While in the quotation from Zarathustra, the lack of a unified goal for mankind is framed as an rebuke.

The second common thread running through both sections is the idea that a goal, once chosen, is the proper determiner of moral values. This is a recurring topic in Nietzsche’s work, which suggests its exegetical importance. In the third book of The Gay Science, Nietzsche writes “With a great goal one is superior even to justice, not only to one’s deeds and one’s judges.” (TGS 267) Later, in Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche ends the first book with his formula for happiness: “The formula for my happiness: a Yes, a No, and a straight line, a goal” (TI, I, 44).

These sections point to one of Nietzsche’s key moral motifs. While I will postpone discussion of this to a later work, I believe the following aphorism captures this theme: “What does your conscience say?-- You shall become the person you are” (TGS, 270).

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39 Nietzsche takes this pithy epigram from Pindar’s second Pythean hymn, it also recurs as the subtitle of Ecce Homo.
This theme has not escaped the notice of modern Nietzsche commentators. J. Richardson emphasizes the importance of freedom (in a specific sense, akin to the one briefly sketched above, i.e., the freedom to become what one is) to Nietzsche’s moral philosophy.

Returning once more to D 108, in the last part of the section, Nietzsche discusses moral systems by diagnosing the mode in which they operate. “[T]he moral law has been supposed to stand above our own likes and dislikes,” is clearly a reference to Kant’s second critique, in which one’s inclinations are inimical to morality. The moral law does not deign comparison to our inclination. It is, in Kant’s language, pure, and thus higher than our inclinations which are merely empirical. Although Nietzsche does not directly confront Kant’s ethical views here, there is the suggestion that they would only be rational if there were an explicit and universal agreement upon them. However, if this were the case, then Nietzsche has misunderstood the most crucial point of Kant’s argument. In fact, on Kant’s account, obeying the moral law consists in “giving the law to oneself” and thereby achieving a properly rational autonomy (i.e. freedom) that cannot be achieved through obedience to custom, utility, or religion. This is precisely the kind of rational autonomy Nietzsche holds to be impossible, but he does not actually provide any arguments to undermine Kant’s account.

The section continues: “one did not want actually to impose this law upon oneself, one wanted to take it from somewhere or discover it somewhere or have it commanded to one from somewhere.” What does Nietzsche mean when he writes that one wants to take the moral law from somewhere? I venture that he refers here to custom, and taking one’s moral valuations from one’s ancestors. Nietzsche often refers to this as the morality of mores.

“Discover it”: This is a thinly veiled reference to social darwinism; the view that the study of the natural world can give moral insight. Utilitarians (like Spencer) argued that the mechanisms of natural selection can illuminate moral thought. Finally, the last part of the
section can securely be read as a reference to divine command theory, and the view that
morality is grounded in religion. Again, the common element in these diverse moral theories is
that they are all unconditional.

Some have argued that this concern for the higher type is the central tenet of
Nietzsche’s moral philosophy. In Nietzsche and the Problem of Morality, F. Cameroon argues
that Nietzsche’s rejects the prevalent moral systems insofar as they function to preserve the
‘herd’ at the expense of the higher type. But I believe this only captures part of the point. I will,
however, again postpone discussion of this to a later chapter.

Finally, and this will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section, Nietzsche
dismisses the view that morality, especially the type of morality that argues from happiness, is
somehow endorsed by evolution.

3.7 Links to Darwinism

Many utilitarians of Nietzsche’s day were supporters of Darwin’s theory of natural
selection. Among the chief English intellectual authorities at the time was H. Spencer, whose
view is a mixture of Mill and Darwin. As discussed in chapter 1, Spencer held that evolution
will eventually lead to the development of “the ideally moral man” in which altruism and
egoism are no longer at odds, but are in fact one selfsame drive. This follows from Spencer’s
views of adaptation and his firm belief in the superiority of the more complex. Nietzsche has
Spencer (among others) in mind when he writes:

Nowadays there is a profoundly erroneous moral doctrine that is celebrated in England: this holds that the judgments of “good” and “evil” sum up experiences of what is “expedient” and “inexpedient.” One holds that what is called good preservers the species, while what is called evil harms the
species. In truth, however, the evil instincts are expedient,
species-preserving, and indispensable to as high a degree as the
good ones; their function is merely different. (GS 4)

By holding a moral doctrine that seeks to minimize suffering, utilitarians who claim to believe in the truth of natural selection are shown to be inconsistent. If the good, or fitness of the species is taken seriously, the absence of suffering may entail undesirable consequence.

This line of thought illuminates Nietzsche’s meaning in section 6 of the preface of *The Genealogy*: “What if the opposite [of utilitarianism] were true. What if a regressive trait lurked in ‘the good man’, likewise a danger, an enticement, a poison, a narcotic, so that the present lived at the expense of the future? Perhaps in more comfort and less danger, but also in a smaller-minded, meaner manner? . . .So that morality itself were to blame if man, as species, never reached his highest potential power and splendor? So that morality itself was the danger of dangers?”

Nietzsche has this evolutionary objection in mind when he asks: “What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the “good,” likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living at the expense of the future?” (GoM P, 6)

By working towards a world in which suffering is minimized and comfort maximized, utilitarians may be fomenting a genetic disaster which will cause future generations far more suffering than that which the current generation avoids. Further, the utilitarian moral outlook is at odds with the Darwinian view of natural selection in that the former would purposively protect and promote what the latter would see culled. In his late writings Nietzsche makes this trope even more explicit: “Pity on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of selection. It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends life’s disinherited and condemned.” (A 7)

Nietzsche problematizes the utilitarian approach. Holding “the preservation and advancement of humanity” (D, 106) as one’s ultimate moral goal leaves many essential questions unanswered: “[Must we] prolong as far as possible the existence of the human race,
or bring about the greatest possible disanimalisation of man? ... the highest degree of happiness which a few individuals might attain, or an incalculable, though finally attainable, average state of happiness for all?” (D, 106) The wording suggests that the first two suggestions (the longest existence and greatest disanimalisation) are meant as fodders, whereas the last two are to be taken seriously. Thus far, we may believe that the greatest happiness of the well formed few is his moral ideal.

3.8 Human Psychology and Utilitarian Calculations

Before closing this chapter, I will consider one final objection Nietzsche makes to utilitarianism. This objection, like several of those that came before it, is grounded in Nietzsche’s theory of human psychology which the next chapter will investigate. The aim of the section is to show that calculations of utility, as envisaged by the consequentialist, are not what they seem. Nietzsche points to several difficulties involved in these calculations: 1. fully divining the consequences of actions. 2. comparing qualitatively different scenarios against one another. 3. acting on the results of the calculation depends on overcoming other motives (of which the calculation itself is only one!).

Alleged conflict of motives. - One speaks of a 'conflict of motives', but designates with this phrase a conflict which is not one of motives. That is to say: before an act there step into our reflective consciousness one after another the consequences of various acts all of which we believe we can perform, and we compare these consequences. We believe we have resolved upon an act when we have decided that its consequences will be more favorable than those of any other; before reaching this conclusion we often honestly torment ourselves on account of the great difficulty of divining what the consequences will be, of seeing all their implications, and of being certain we have included them all without omission: so that the result obtained still has to be divided by chance. Indeed, to come to the worst difficulty: all these consequences, so hard to determine individually, now have to be weighed against one another on the same scales; but usually it happens that, on account of the differences in the quality of all these possible consequences, we lack the scales and the weights for this casuistry of advantage. Supposing, however, we got through that too, and
chance had placed on our scales consequences that admit of
being weighed against one another: we would then in fact
possess in our picture of the consequences of a certain action a
motive for performing this action - yes! one motive! But at the
moment when we finally do act, our action is often enough
determined by a different species of motives than the species
here under discussion, those involved in our 'picture of the
consequences'. What here comes into play is the way we
habitually expend our energy; or some slight instigation from a
person whom we fear or honor or love; or our indolence, which
prefers to do what lies closest to hand; or an excitation of our
imagination brought about at the decisive moment by some
immediate, very trivial event; quite incalculable physical
influences come into play; caprice and waywardness come into
play; some emotion or other happens quite by chance to leap
forth: in short, there come into play motives in part unknown
to us, in part known very ill, which we can never take account
of beforehand. Probably a struggle takes place between these
as well, a battling to and fro, a rising and falling of the scales -
and this would be the actual 'conflict of motives': - something
quite invisible to us of which we would be quite unconscious. I
have calculated the consequences and the outcomes and in
doing so have set one very essential motive in the battle-line -
but I have not set up this battle-line itself, nor can I even see it:
the struggle itself is hidden from me, and likewise the victory
as victory; for, though I certainly learn what I finally do, I do
not learn which motive has therewith actually proved
victorious. But we are accustomed to exclude all these
unconscious processes from the accounting and to reflect on
the preparation for an act only to the extent that it is conscious:
and we thus confuse conflict of motives with comparison of
the possible consequences of different actions - a confusion
itself very rich in consequences and one highly fateful for the
evolution of morality! (D 129)

In undermining the traditional picture of an autonomous, self-transparent and free
agent, Nietzsche seriously jeopardizes the utilitarian position. All idealized classroom scenarios
aside, what really are utility calculations? Aside from the prickly problems of thinking through
(the possibly infinite) consequences and weighing radically different alternatives “on the same
scales.” Nietzsche points to an original and serious further challenge.

Supposing we actually went through our utility calculation to choose between two
options (say A and B) and have determined with certainty that A produces more utility. This
certainty in no way translates into action. Instead, it becomes only one more incentive to do A,
but that in no way necessitates doing A. Nietzsche speaks, in the section above, about “motives
in part unknown to us, in part known very ill, which we can never take account of beforehand.”
We will explore further the meaning of these pregnant words in the next chapter when we consider Nietzsche’s view on action and agency.

3.9 Conclusion

We have considered a number of objections Nietzsche puts forth to utilitarianism as a moral system. Taken altogether, these objections form a rejection of all of the tenets of mainstream utilitarianism. For Nietzsche, the *ought* of utilitarianism’s imperative to maximize happiness is rejected for five reasons: 1. There is no agreement on what constitutes happiness. 2. One cannot maximize happiness while simultaneously minimizing suffering. 3. Such an action may lead us into an evolutionary *cul-de-sac*. 4. Suffering is essential to the human experience. 5. Human happiness rests on ‘unknowable’ laws. 6. The motivation provided by utilitarian calculations (assuming they turn out to be tractable) is only one element in a ‘hidden struggle’.

Further, Nietzsche rejects utilitarianism’s universal applicability. His reasoning is that it is the well formed few that are responsible for mankind’s most lasting achievements, and as such, what applies to them is not that which applies to the rest of mankind.

These objections have various registers: metaphysical, logical, and psychological. The remainder of this study will focus on the last of these registers. We will follow-up on objections 5 and 6 by interrogating Nietzsche’s view of the ego.

It is helpful to note that Nietzsche makes room for a measure of arbitrariness in the composition of the self. By allowing for (what we now know as) unconscious motivation, the traditional view of self-interest, as understood by utilitarians becomes unsalvageable. If the self is divided, then what counts as self-interest?

To better understand the issue, the next chapter will make a detailed exploration of Nietzsche’s conception of the ego.
CHAPTER 4

THE DIVIDED SELF

[N]othing can be more incomplete than one’s image of the totality of drives that constitutes one’s being (D 119)

4.1 Introduction

In this section, I will attempt to piece together Nietzsche’s notion of the self. I will proceed by close examination of book II of *Daybreak* which, as will be seen, contains the most complete exposition of Nietzsche’s views on the subject of the “I”; through a close inspection of a particular string of aphorisms we will attempt to understand the schema Nietzsche articulates. It will also be seen that Nietzsche’s conception of the self is in line with and supportive of his objections to morality as reviewed in chapter 3 of this study.

Book II of *Daybreak* can be divided along three main lines: 1. Origins of and preconditions for morality. 2. The divided self and the theory of drives. 3. Objections to *pity* and its place in Utilitarianism and Christianity. We have already considered briefly the first and third of these areas in the preceding chapter. In this chapter, we will look more closely at Nietzsche’s conception of the self as it occurs in book II of *Daybreak*. That is not to say that these subjects occur independently in the text. Rather, as is usually the case, Nietzsche treats these topics in an interrelated manner, frequently shifting registers from psychology to (his brand of) historical anthropology to (a pseudo-Kantian) metaphysics.

For Nietzsche, as we have glimpsed above, morality is based on untenable grounds. Section 101 brings this to light, asking if dishonesty, cowardice, and laziness (qualities one would have if one accepts a belief merely out of custom) are themselves preconditions of morality. I take Nietzsche’s point to be that the reason philosophers have accepted these ungrounded concepts is because they are customary. The deeper point is that it is human
psychology that ultimately grounds these fundamental ideas and not some objective fact(s) about the world.

Section 111, in which Nietzsche gives a genealogy of a typical philosophical bias, supports this interpretation. Titled *To the admirers of objectivity*, the section aims to explain psychologically why neutrality of judgement is regarded as an intellectual asset. One whose formative experiences were predominantly emotional and tended away from “subtle judgement and pleasure in intellectual justice” will as an adult “under pressure of this experience, towards which he feels himself powerless” will find that “every new thing, every new person, at once arouses in him liking or dislike or envy or contempt.” As such, “he admires neutrality of sentiment, or ‘objectivity’, as a matter of genius or of the rarest morality, and refuses to believe that this too is only the *child of habit and discipline*.”

### 4.2 Problematizing the Self

Section 105, *Pseudo-egoism*, deals with “the strange world of phantasms” which constitutes the inner realm. Although people seem egoistic,

> the great majority nonetheless do nothing for their ego their whole life long: what they do is done for the phantom of their ego which has formed itself in the heads of those around them and has been communicated to them. ... This fog of habits and opinions lives and grows independently of the people it envelops ... all because no individual among this majority is capable of setting up a real ego, accessible to him and fathomed by him, in opposition to the general pale fiction and thereby annihilating it. (D 105)

This section is central to understanding Nietzsche’s view of the self, and ties in to his moral views. First, as discussed above, Nietzsche takes confusing knowledge about one’s self with knowledge about others to be one of the basic errors of morality. In D 118, Nietzsche speaks of the neighbor: “We understand nothing of him except the *change in us* of which he is the cause - our knowledge of him is like a hollow space *which has been shaped*.” As our
knowledge of others is really knowledge of changes in our internal states, our knowledge of ourselves is knowledge of what others have communicated to us by others.

But the knowledge (about ourselves) that others will communicate to us isn’t really knowledge about us at all. Rather, what is communicated to us is the result of the change our presence causes in others, and this evaluation is based on the evaluation of other others, and so on ad infinitum - or until one arrives at a real ego. In that, this arrangement brings to mind the fantastic halls of mirrors sometimes found in country fairs.

So what the majority call their ego is an accumulation of “impersonal, semi-personal, and arbitrary, as it were poetical evaluations, the one for ever in the head of someone else, and the head of this someone else again in the heads of others: a strange world of phantasms which at the same time knows how to put on a sober appearance.” (D 105)

The second point to note is that the section implies the existence of a minority of real egos; the section immediately preceding illuminates this. For Nietzsche, all actions are traceable to evaluations and all evaluations are either original or adopted. An original evaluations is “to assess a thing according to the extent to which it pleases or displeases us alone and no one else.” However, the great majority of evaluations are adopted. “Why do we adopt them? From fear - that is to say, we consider it more advisable to pretend they are our own - and accustom ourself to this pretense, so that at length it becomes our own nature. ... most of us are our whole lives long the fools of the way we acquired in childhood of judging our neighbors.” (D 104) So a real ego is one that is arrived at through original evaluations, by appealing to and asserting one’s inner nature rather than by appeal to others\(^\text{41}\). This may seem circular, but I believe Nietzsche’s introduction of arbitrariness into the self creates room for a

\[^{41}\text{See HatH 571: “Our own opinions. - The first opinion that occurs to us when we are suddenly asked about something is usually not our own but only the customary one pertaining to our caste, station, origin; our own opinions rarely swim to the top.”}]

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non-circular (albeit unsatisfying) definition: real egos are a small portion of egos that simply happen to be that way.

Another idea to note here is the implicit argument against utilitarianism that can be drawn from this section. If the majority of people are unable to ‘set up a real ego’ through which they produce original evaluations, i.e., real, genuine judgments about whether a thing pleases or displeases, then the concept of general utility is dangerously undermined.

4.3 The Self as a Multiplicity of Drives

Having problematized the generally accepted notion of the self, Nietzsche begins his positive account with section 109. Section 109 is often quoted in the literature and deals with methods of “combating the vehemence” of a drive, i.e. breaking undesirable habits. Nietzsche provides six ways of doing this, which he summarizes towards the end of the section:

Avoiding opportunities, implanting regularity into the drive, engendering satiety and disgust with it and associating it with a painful idea (such as that of disgrace, evil consequences or offended pride), then dislocation of forces and finally a general weakening and exhaustion. (D 109)

Interesting as Nietzsche’s ‘self-help’ recipes are, the relevant part of the section is what follows:

[T]hat one desires to combat the vehemence of a drive at all, however, does not stand within our own power; nor does the choice of any particular method; nor does the success or failure of that method. What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of another drive which is a rival of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us whether it be the drive to restfulness, or the fear of disgrace and other evil consequences, or love. While ‘we’ believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive which is complaining about another; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the vehemence of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive and that a struggle is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides. (D 109)

There are several things we must note about this passage. The first is ‘our’ status in light of this analysis of the self as a social structure of drives. In the fourth part of Beyond
Good and Evil, Nietzsche gives us this to ponder: “To our strongest drive, the tyrant in us, not only our reason bows, but also our conscience.” (BGE, 158) Immediately, the pairing of reason and conscience bring to mind Plato’s tripartite image of the soul. If we are right in assuming that Nietzsche is aiming at criticizing this conception of the self, then this may be understood as an attack Plato’s notion of reason.

Reason, in the Platonic sense is that which could see past confusing, illusory appearances and realize the objective truth. In the best case scenario, reason would be in control of our appetite and conscience. Whereas for Nietzsche, reason is always subservient to our tyrant drive. Reason, for Nietzsche is prompted and directed by the dominant, overpowering drive.42 As for objective truth, we have already shown how Nietzsche’s historical sense leads him to the claim that there is no eternal truth. Nietzsche embraces a more skeptical solution: “Ultimate skepsis.- What are man’s truths ultimately? Merely his irrefutable errors.” (GS, 265)

One can profitably ask with what resources does our intellect make the choice of which drive to serve. The answer, I believe, is given in BGE 158: the intellect takes the side of whichever drive is dominant. And this dominant drive is, for all purposes and intents, constitutive of the ‘I.’ (The pressing question now concerns the mechanism which determines which drive dominates. We shall consider that shortly.)

This is a crucial point and deserves stressing. Traditionally, the intellect has been considered (either descriptively normatively) hegemonic in its rule over the internal world. By relegating the intellect to the status of a tool of the dominant drive, Nietzsche undermines the traditional (Platonic) top-down hierarchy of faculties proposing, instead, a battlefield of drives of varying power.

42 In D119, Nietzsche speaks of this drive as the “prompter of the reasoning faculty.”
G. Parkes arrives at a similar interpretation through consideration of the following passage from Nietzsche’s notes:

The I is not the attitude of one being to several (drives, thoughts, etc.) but the ego is a plurality of personlike forces, of which now this one now that one stands in the foreground as ego and regards the others as a subject regards and influential and determining external world. (KSA 9:6[70])

From the above, Parkes concludes that for Nietzsche “The I is not something stable that is independent from the drives, but that any preponderant drives (or groups of drives) may ‘stand in the foreground as ego’ and complain, or prevail as I.” However, Parkes’ interpretation of the next two sections I consider disagrees with mine. By his lights, sections 113 and 114 revolve around the issue of suffering. But as I will show, Nietzsche does not mean wretchedness and adversity, and an interpretation that takes his meaning literally in theses sections misses the point.

My interpretation finds the kernel of Nietzsche’s notions of will to power and the ascetic priest from GoM III in the same sections. It is widely held that the first public appearance of the doctrine of the will to power appears in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, where it is one of the three major teachings Zarathustra has to offer (the others being the overman and the eternal recurrence). From that point on, the idea gathers force. By the time Nietzsche is writes Beyond Good and Evil, the conception of will to power will have gone far beyond a psychological principle; it illuminates, for the ‘mature’ Nietzsche, the ontological essence of nature.

4.4 Excavating the Will to Power

43 G. Parkes, 1998, p.7-35. However, in previous work - Composing the Soul, University of Chicago Press, 1994 - Parkes points to book II of Daybreak as containing “a remarkable revisioning of the I in terms of drives.” (p.289)
44 G. Parkes, 1998, p. 10
45 See for example the introduction to the Cambridge edition of Beyond Good and Evil by Rolf-Peter Horstmann, p.XXV
46 See, BGE sections 13 and 259.
A common criticism of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power is that it is never fully elaborated in his works. One of the goals of this study is to excavate Nietzsche’s fundamental notions by a close inspection of the origins of these crucial concepts in his early works. Since Nietzsche never gives definitions for these ideas, my strategy is to articulate their first appearances in his published oeuvre. Nietzsche frequently reminds his readers of the necessity of a close familiarity with his earlier books.

In the preface of *The Genealogy* Nietzsche warns his readers that “if this book is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on his ears, the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and his not spared some trouble in doing so.” (GoM, P 8) This sort of disclaimer, discouraging people from reading his books, is found in most of Nietzsche’s middle and late works.

This reinforces my belief in the necessity of a close reading of Nietzsche’s early works, especially *Daybreak*, for an informed understanding of these elusive ideas. This belief is further strengthened by the conspicuous number of references Nietzsche makes to this work in his *Genealogy*. My claim here is that (what will later become) the idea of the will to power originates in book II of *Daybreak*. Section 113, titled *The striving for distinction*, sketches the mode of operation of an “extravagant”, ancient, and culturally ubiquitous drive:

“The striving for distinction is the striving for domination over the next man, though it be a very indirect domination and only felt or even dreamed” (D 113). This drive takes a multitude of forms, so many that “a complete catalogue of them would be almost the same thing as a history of culture.” Domination over the next man’ forms a spectrum: beginning at brute physical violence, moving upwards to arousing envy or admiration, further refined to become to derision and mockery, finally reaching its most subtle form in the figure of the

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47 GoM: P 4, II 2, II 6, III 9, III 10, III 24, as well as references to King Visvamitra in III 10 which occurs in D 113 and to Hesiod’s dilemma in I 10 which occurs in D 189.
48 In BGE 259, Nietzsche calls the will to power “the primordial fact of all history.”
ascetic “who feels the highest enjoyment by himself enduring, as a consequence of his drive for
distinction, precisely that which, on the first step of the ladder, his counterpart the barbarian
imposes on others and whom and before whom he wants to distinguish himself” (D 113).

The gist of the section is that much of our social behavior is motivated by one of the
drives that constitute our internal economy. This drive is gratified when some other person
“suffers from us.” (D 113) Nietzsche’s meaning doesn’t restrict ‘suffering’ to nasty
experiences, rather, gratification of this drive obtains when one “has impressed himself on the
soul of the other, changed it’s shape and ruled over it at his own sweet will.” (D 113) This is
why interpretations that restrict Nietzsche’s usage of suffering to anguish and distress (like
Parkes’s does) miss the essential point: that distinction (power) is the ability to have an impact
on others. While tormenting the other is a part of it, it by no means covers the whole.

N continues:

The triumph of the ascetic over himself, his glance turned
inwards which beholds man split asunder into a sufferer and a
spectator, and henceforth gazes out into the outer world only in
order to gather as it were wood for his own pyre, this final
tragedy of the drive for distinction in which there is only one
character burning and consuming himself - this is a worthy
conclusion and one appropriate to the commencement: in both
cases an unspeakable happiness at the sight of torment ⁴⁹ (D
113).

⁴⁹ Compare this to the following passage from The Genealogy:

“For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here an unparalleled ressentiment rules,that of an
unfulfilled instinct and will to power that wants to be master, not over something in life,but over
life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions; here, an attempt is made to use
power to block the sources of the power; here, the green eye of spite turns on physiological
growth itself, in particular the manifestation of this in beauty and joy;while satisfaction is looked
for and found in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of
selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice. This is all paradoxical in the extreme: we are faced
with a conflict that wills itself to be conflicting, which relishes itself in this affliction and becomes
more self-assured and triumphant to the same degree as its own condition, the physiological
capacity to live, decreases. ‘Triumph precisely in the final agony’: the ascetic ideal has always
fought under this exaggerated motto; in this seductive riddle, this symbol of delight and anguish,
recognizes its brightest light, its salvation, its ultimate victory.” (GoM, III, 11)

The similarities between what Nietzsche term ‘the striving for distinction’ in Daybreak and ‘will to
power’ in the Genealogy are striking. As is the extent to which his conception of the ascetic
priest, although significantly enriched by the time of writing the Genealogy, remains faithful to
his original conception from his earlier work.
This is undeniably similar to the ‘mature’ Nietzsche’s concept of will to power: a “discharge of strength” (BGE 13); “a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs” (GoM I, 13). However, as Nietzsche’s thought progresses, the will to power swells from a drive among many to that which underlies all drives: “Assuming, finally, that we succeeded in explaining our entire life of drives as the organization and outgrowth of one basic form of will (namely, of the will to power, which is my claim); assuming we could trace all organic functions back to this will to power.”

My interpretation of the striving for distinction as a forerunner of the will to power finds echoes in the secondary literature. In his study Will to Power, A Lingis writes: “To exist is to make one’s presence felt. ... A will commands, it affirms itself. ... For a will to affirm itself is for it to affirm its difference. For Nietzsche, the feeling of distinction is the fundamental affect of power.” However, the author takes a different route towards this understanding of this crucial concept. Rather than an analysis of Nietzsche’s early works, Lingis arrives at his interpretation through an interrogation of the second essay of The Genealogy.

### 4.5 Return to the Divided Self

We return, after this digression into Nietzsche’s early thoughts on will to power, to his conception of the self. Section 115, The so-called ‘ego’, tells us why the fiction that is the ego is taken as truth: “Language and the prejudices upon which language is based are a manifold hindrance to us when we want to explain inner processes and drives.” (D 115) The argument here is this: where we have no words to express our internal states, exact thought is “painful.”

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50 This is more pronounced in Nietzsche's notes: “In the case of an animal, all its drives can be traced back to the will to power: likewise all the functions of organic life to this one source.” KSA 36[31]
51 D. Allison (ed.), 1985, p.38, 39
The vocabulary that describes internal states (such as “anger, hatred, love, pity, desire, knowledge, joy, pain”) only names “superlative degrees of these processes and drives. ... extreme states.” Thus “the milder, middle degrees, not to speak of the lower degrees which are continually in play, elude us, and yet it is they which weave the web of our character and our destiny.”

The states that we consider formative of our inner experience, the states which we can name, are only the “violent exceptions.” It is no wonder then that we, as observers of ourselves, are so apt to being mislead about our true nature. “We are none of us that which we appear to be in accordance with the states for which alone we have consciousness and words, ... those cruder outbursts of which alone we are aware make us misunderstand ourselves, we draw a conclusion on the basis of data in which the exceptions outweigh the rule.”

It is thus fitting that the next section address “the primeval delusion that one knows how human action is brought about.” (D 116) Nietzsche first gives a pithy and telling summary of “what is essentially involved in the process of action in every other person:

I know what I want, what I have done, I am free and responsible for it, I hold others responsible, I can call by its name every moral possibility and every inner motion which precedes action; you may act as you will - in this matter I understand myself and understand you all! (D 116)

This, for Nietzsche, is what actions traditionally appear to be: self-transparent, free, and morally answerable. He calls this view of action “moral realism.” However, in this section, Nietzsche goes no further than rejecting this view as a “universal madness. ... Actions are never what they appear to us to be! We have expended so much labour on learning that external things are not as they appear to us to be - very well! the case is the same with the inner world! Moral actions are in reality ‘something other than that’ - more we cannot say: and all actions are essentially unknown.” (D 116) The reasons for this rejection are probably his conviction of the truth of his theory of the self as an arena of drives, his rejection of free agency, and his denial of the existence of a self-transparent subject.
We now arrive at a watershed point for psychology, for it is precisely here that Nietzsche advances his critique of the subject. By pointing to the essential unknowability (or what a post-Freudian would call the libidinal components) of action, Nietzsche casts doubt on the classical notion that the subject is completely transparent to herself. This trope is buttressed by a second from the philosophy of language (later investigated by Wittgenstein among others): by tying inner experience to a predetermined set of concepts (i.e. words), Nietzsche highlights a dependence that had previously gone unquestioned. This dependence shows that the human subject will never exhaust or fully constitute the realm of inner knowledge (as transcendental philosophy assumes).52

Together, these two currents seriously jeopardize the classical notion of the subject as normatively self-determining. Nietzsche seems to have this in mind; in the same section he both praises Platonic philosophy for its innovativeness in construing agency then derides it for being “innocently credulous in regard to that most fateful or prejudices, that profoundest of errors, that ‘right knowledge must be followed by right action.’”

In this principle they were still the heirs of the universal madness and presumption that there exists knowledge as to the essential nature of action. ‘For it would be terrible if insight into the nature of right action were not followed by right action’ - this is the only kind of proof these great men deemed necessary for demonstrating the truth of this idea, the opposite seemed to them crazy and unthinkable - and yet this opposite is precisely the naked reality demonstrated daily and hourly from time immemorial! (D 116)

Daybreak 117 attacks the conventional notion of experience as given: “and it is all of it an error. ... The habits of our senses have woven us into lies and deception of sensation: these again are the basis of all our judgements and ‘knowledge.’” Strongly echoing Kant’s prohibition of knowledge of things in themselves, Nietzsche continues: “We sit within our nets, we spiders, and whatever we may catch in it we catch nothing at except that which allows itself to be caught in precisely our net.”

52 A. Honneth, 2007, Ch. 9
This is connected to what Nietzsche says (in section 102 and 118) about our moral evaluations. In the same way we confuse knowledge of the self with knowledge of the other when we make moral evaluations, our sensations of the external world are based on our peculiar “horizons, within which each of us encloses his senses as if behind prison walls.

According to the average quantity of experiences and excitations possible to us at any particular point in time one measures one’s life as being short or long, poor or rich, full or empty: and according to the average human life one measures that of all other creatures. ... If our eyes were a hundredfold sharper, man would appear to us tremendously tall ... there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the real world! (D 117)

This section puts forth Nietzsche’s perspectivalism in full view: There is no objectively real world. What we receive from our senses is an interpretation which is peculiar to us.

Speaking precisely, there are no things, no persons, only interpretations and interpretations of interpretations. There are only perspectives: this is what perspectivism in Nietzsche means.

The culmination of the themes discussed in this chapter culminate in the next section. Nietzsche gives a concrete formulation of the self by elaborating further his conception of drives:

“However far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete that 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)

These drives desire nutriment. Nietzsche speaks metaphorically of course, and what is meant that these drives seek our attention and our resources. The drive to possess may push me to merely to yearn for a new car, if this drive is nurtured it may press me to work so that I can afford one, or, if it completely tyrannizes my inner economy, to robbery.

4.6 Drives, Dreams, and Experience
We have seen that the drives are in a constant state of change. Each circumstance presenting nutrition for one or another of the drives that populate our inner being. However, since we are not the sole determiners of our circumstances, chance plays a large role in the nutriment of drives. In Nietzsche’s phrasing:

This nutriment is therefore a work of chance: our daily experiences throw some prey in the way of now this, now that drive, and the drive seizes it eagerly; but the coming and going of these events as a while stands in no rational relationship to the nutritional requirements of the totality of the drives: so that the outcome will always be twofold - the starvation and stunting of some and the overfeeding of others. (D 119)

This is essentially what Nietzsche takes ‘experience’ to be: means of nourishment for the multiplicity of fluctuating drives that inhabit our interiority. Every event of daily life is scrutinized by this host of competing tendencies, and our consciousness is “a more or less fantastic commentary on and unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text.” The question now is what is it that does this feeling. The clues we have gathered so far suggest that this feeling is an inseparable part of one’s perspective; i.e. the interpretation given by whatever drive is dominant at the time of one’s evaluation.

N supports his claim by putting forward an argument from dreams. Why is it that our dreams differ so greatly from one night to the next? The answer is not to in our surroundings, for the stimuli that we are under while asleep is much the same on one night as on another. Nietzsche gives a robust answer to this question by appealing the theory of drives: “the meaning and value of our dreams is precisely to compensate to some extent for the chance absence of ‘nourishment’ during the day.” (D 119) Anyone with even a passing familiarity of Freud’s work will recognize how central this idea is to psychoanalysis.

The inner machinations of our bodies, the pressure and texture of our beds, the incidental sounds of the night are all part of a text that is “commented on in such varying ways, that the inventive reasoning faculty imagines today a cause for the nervous stimuli so very different from the cause it imagined yesterday, though the stimuli are the same: the explanation
of this is that today’s prompter of the reasoning faculty was different from yesterday’s - a
different drive wanted to gratify itself, to be active, to exercise itself, to refresh itself, to
discharge itself - today this drive was at high flood, yesterday it was a different drive that was
in that condition.” (D 119)

In these wildly varying commentaries on the text of our sleeping life, the moral drives
that have been deprived of their ‘nourishment’ in the waking part of the day feed. These drives,
in their permanent quest for satisfaction, were thwarted during day (by chance, or by the
dominance of another, more powerful drive) procure for themselves in dreams a space to
discharge. What accounts for the immense difference between our dreams is that the
interpretation of the (non-varying) nocturnal text is carried out by different drives in different
states of hunger.

Nietzsche presents a similar picture of dreams in his previous work, Human all to
Human.53 However, while the overall schema of dreams being the interpretation of somnolent
stimulation, he speaks of dreams as “the seeking and positing of the causes of this excitement
of the sensibilities, that is to say the supposed causes. ... so that the first plausible hypothesis
for explaining a sensation that occurs to [the dreamer] is at once accepted as the truth.” (HatH
13) That is to say that dreams are interpretations of nocturnal stimulation, but these
interpretations are “blunders”. As we can see, there is no mention of drives in Nietzsche’s
previous interpretation of dreams.

However, Daybreak presents a definite break in his previous views concerning the
relationship between waking and oneiric life, and this is the most important move made in this
new account.

Waking life does not have this freedom of interpretation
possessed by the life of dreams, it is less inventive and
unbridled - but do I have to add that when we are awake our
drives likewise do nothing but interpret nervous stimuli and,
according to their requirements, posit their ‘causes’? that there

53 HatH, 13.
is no essential difference between waking and dreaming? that when we compare very different stages of culture we even find that freedom of waking interpretation in the one is in no way inferior to the freedom exercised while dreaming? that our moral judgements and evaluations too are only images and fantasies based on a physiological process unknown to us, a kind of acquired language for designating certain nervous stimuli? that all our so called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable but felt text. (D 119)

N concludes his exposition of his theory with one of the most memorable examples in Daybreak:

Take some trifling experience. Suppose we were in the market place one day and we noticed someone laughing at us as we went by: this event will signify this or that to us according to whether this or that drive happens at that moment to be at its height in us - and it will be a quite different event according to the kind of person we are. One person will absorb it like a drop of rain, another will shake it from him like an insect, another will try to pick a quarrel, another will examine his clothing to see if there is anything about it that might give rise to laughter, another will be led to reflect on the nature of laughter as such, another will be glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world - and in each case a drive has gratified itself, whether it be the drive to annoyance or to combativeness or to reflection or to benevolence. This drive seized the event as its prey: why precisely this one? Because, thirsty and hungry, it was lying in wait. (D 119)

In the a vein similar to the explanation of the variety of dreams, Nietzsche attributes the existence of a whole spectrum of possible reactions to an ordinary situations to the activities of our drives. Our reaction is the outcome of our most ferocious drive seizing the event as its prey in the same way as what particular dream we have is.

4.7 Conclusion

We have reviewed Nietzsche’s theory of the self. Our most important findings have been that our behavior at any given time is strongly influenced by an internal struggle of unconscious drives. These drives are portrayed as internal mechanisms (machines even) with a built in goal, the more they attain their goal the more nourished they are, and thus the more
likely they are to attain future nourishment. Inevitably, our experience is exploited by one drive or another and taken as nourishment.

This is why Nietzsche treats consciousness as “more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable but felt text” (D119). What we take to be ‘experience’ is nothing but the interplay of drives. Nietzsche’s analysis of the waking world of consciousness applies to our oneiric lives as well. The continuous rise and fall of drives’ level of nourishment accounts for a constant flux in our dominating drive, therefore, the repetitious text of sleeping is interpreted in such manifold manners.

In the final chapter, I will consider the impact of this theory on Nietzsche’s critique of utilitarianism as well as conclude this study by restating its findings.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

A confrontation with Nietzsche is a difficult thing to arrange. - P. Foot, 1973

This thesis is an attempt to grapple with Nietzsche’s moral philosophy. As the sheer abundance of the literature testifies, this is a difficult thing. Given the intrinsically puzzling of Nietzsche’s project, a multiple-approach type strategy was more suitable. In the first chapter of the study, H. Spencer’s moral work was studied in some detail. This was done with the assumption that Spencer’s thought exerted a significant influence on Nietzsche’s. It has been shown that Nietzsche’s critique of Spencer has exerted a significant influence of Nietzsche critique of morality. The negative part of this critique is largely effective, but that it fails to provide solid grounds for the positive assertions that Nietzsche seems to think he can derive from it (like the distinction between authentic and inauthentic evaluation; the distinction between lower and higher types; etc.)

In Spencer ethics, Nietzsche’s moral philosophy finds its ideal antagonist. This is betrayed both by Nietzsche’s contemptuously nonchalant attitude towards Spencer in his published works and by the copious amount of unpublished notes that refer to Spencer.

Examining Nietzsche’s reactions to his antagonist comprises a second strategy to understand Nietzsche’s moral philosophy employed in this thesis. This involved a close reading of one particular aphorism (GS 378). In preparation for that aphorism, a number of important Nietzschean concepts had to be clarified, such as the historical sense and order of rank.

The importance of history to Nietzsche’s work as a philosopher was underlined, and the concept of the historical sense is the fruit of his historical labors. The historical sense was defined as the ability to understand different cultures as they did themselves, i.e., to be able to

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set aside the prejudices of one’s own locale. I would have liked to assert that the concept of the historical sense arose in Nietzsche’s thought because of his engagement with (the starkly 
*ahistorical*) work of H. Spencer, however, I currently have not the resources to make that claim.

The order of rank proved more difficult to unpack. Tersely, the order of rank points to Nietzsche’s conception of human excellence. It is a measure of the ‘health’ of the soul. To the extent that this is inegalitarian, it is an objection to one of the main tenets of utilitarians from Bentham to Smart: ‘each counts as one and none for more than one.’

In replying to Spencer’s ethical project, Nietzsche often skirts moral issues altogether - as if implying that the discourse of the former is unequal, or undeserving of refutation - focusing on what is mainly an epistemological/metaphysical issue. Spencer, it turns out, does not grasp the really important questions in morality: the question of the value of values.

From considering Nietzsche’s reply to Spencer, the study *zooms out* and looks over all of Nietzsche’s arguments against utilitarianism, arguably, the dominant moral system of the times. In doing this, Nietzsche’s entire corpus was surveyed and a number of arguments distilled. This forms the third strategy employed here. This study does not deeply interrogate the arguments individually because the aim of this survey was not to refute utilitarianism with help from Nietzsche, but rather, to come to a better understand of how he thought about moral issues.

The conclusions that emerge from consideration of Nietzsche’s arguments to utilitarianism is that Nietzsche’s rejects utilitarianism because for a number reasons, one of which is that utilitarianism rests on an unrealistic view of human psychology, specifically, a unified and transparent ego.

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55 In fairness, Nietzsche does often stress his aversion to refutations: “[W]hat business is it of mine to refute! – but, as befits a positive mind, to replace the improbable with the more probable and in some circumstances to replace one error with another.” (GoM, Intro, 4)
This final objection lays the groundwork for an exploration of Nietzsche’s view of the self. This is a rewarding and interesting avenue. And in it the last strategy employed in grasping Nietzsche’s moral views: a close reading of a string of aphorisms from *Daybreak*, an early text.

Aside from articulating Nietzsche’s theory of drives, this approach yielded a wealth of insight into two of Nietzsche’s core concepts: the *will to power* and the distinction between *master morality* and *slave morality*. These complicated and controversial ideas first appeared in *Daybreak*, and a close inspection of their germinal forms is helpful.

The *will to power* finds its first expression as an “extravagant” and culturally ubiquitous drive, *the striving for distinction*. The striving for distinction is only one drive among many that populate our inner arena. These drives are in a constant, dynamic contest for *gratification*. The more a drive is *gratified*, the more powerful it grows and the more capable it is to obtain further *gratification* or *nutrition*. A drive’s nutrition is the stuff of experience, seized upon and interpreted in such a way that it augments this drive or that. The agent, for Nietzsche, then is in a state of continual flux, depending on which drive monopolizes her attention and resources.

The striving for distinction, on my interpretation, is the drive to have some sort of *impact* on another. This can be understood to mean something as crude as violently thrashing someone. It can also be teasing them. Or arousing within them jealousy, admiration, fear, lust, or any number of states. The key thing is “to make one’s presence felt.” The claim that the will to power started out as the striving for distinction is supported by comparison of Nietzsche’s early texts to some parts of *The Genealogy*. While this does not conclusively support my claim, it does augur well.

Nietzsche uses his theory of drives to understand a number phenomena that would resist explanation if one adopts (say) the Cartesian view of the ego. Most prominent among these are the variety of dreams (keeping in mind that nocturnal stimuli are more or less consistent) and
the differences in one’s reaction to trivial situations (such as being laughed at in a market). In both these cases Nietzsche attributes the result to the fluctuation of the dominant drive. So, one night the drive to escape is dominant, and so one dreams she is being chased by wolves. Or, the next morning, the drive to cheerfulness is dominant, so the laugher in the market makes her “glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world.”

Adding this element of *arbitrariness* to the make-up of the self is a major contribution to Nietzsche’s critique of utilitarianism. This arbitrariness is introduced in two ways. The first is that the condition of any drive at a given point is determined by how well fed it is, which is determined by a set of arbitrary circumstances. Secondly, the dominant drive is in a continuous flux, so that the controlling urge cannot be determined ahead of time.

For one, this off-sets the (overly-)predictable picture of human nature offered by utilitarians. If Nietzsche’s claims about the transitory nature of all moral facts are to be believed, then it surely, is not the case that there is no more to life than obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain. Nietzsche’s more nuanced theory of human motivation is far more adaptable to cultural variations than that of the utilitarians.

Finally, Nietzsche’s revision of agency and motivation undermines the idea of utility as a robust and universal motivator. Consider: what is beneficial for one drive is fatal to another. In fact, if Nietzsche’s picture of the self is to be adopted we become *an arena* of drives battling for dominance. To nourish one part of ourselves it to deprive another. That is the reality of the self, argues Nietzsche. Utilitarians, on the other hand, would argue that we must limit ourselves to a condition that is most conducive to the largest possible number of people. Aside from Nietzsche’s rejection of utilitarianism on the grounds of its unsuitability for the elite few, he argues that this imperative is largely based on a facile view of human psychology.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


