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# Is Nietzsche a Virtue Theorist?

**Jessica N. Berry**[1]

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## 1 Introduction

Nietzsche makes liberal use of the language of virtue and vice, and he often appears to be praising and exhorting, condemning and encouraging his readers in just such language. He reflects thoughtfully and at length on issues of character, habit and motivation. And his critical enterprise is explicitly framed by a concern with human flourishing (*GM* P:3).[1] But is Nietzsche a virtue theorist? Notwithstanding a number of strenuous efforts to read him as one, the answer to this question has to be 'no'.

[1] Nietzsche's works will be cited by section rather than page numbers, using the following abbreviations to refer to these translations:

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| *A* | *The Anti-Christ*, trans. J. Norman, in A. Ridley and J. Norman (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). |
| *BGE* | *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). |
| *D* | *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). |
| *EH* | *Ecce Homo*, trans. J. Norman, in A. Ridley and J. Norman (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). |
| *GM* | *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. M. Clark and A. J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998). |
| *GS* | *The Gay Science*, trans. J. Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). |
| *HH* | *Human, All Too Human*, vols. I and II, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). |
| *TI* | *Twilight of the Idols,* trans. J. Norman, in A. Ridley and J. Norman (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). |
| *WS* | "The Wanderer and His Shadow" in *HH* II, *op. cit.* |

✉ Jessica N. Berry
jberry@gsu.edu

[1] Georgia State University, P.O. Box 3994, Atlanta, GA 30302, USA

In the first two sections of this paper, I present two serious obstacles to the development of a virtue-theoretic reading of Nietzsche. In the face of such obstacles, determined commentators have been forced, or at least tempted, to read selectively, to dismiss textual counterevidence as hyperbole or irony, or to otherwise modify or outright deny what Nietzsche says in the interest of supplying him with views compatible with the contemporary virtue tradition in ethical thought. Ultimately, I think, no such interpretation can be sustained without doing unacceptable violence to the texts. And it need not be done, since, as I argue in the third section, efforts to read Nietzsche as a virtue theorist have so far been predicated on a false dilemma. Once we reject it, we will see that there is nothing to motivate the virtue-theoretic reading.[2] In fact, it is neither necessary nor desirable to force upon Nietzsche any affirmative morality, since the challenge that his critical philosophy imposes on us is more provocative and philosophically interesting than any virtue-theoretic reading on offer.

## 2 The First Obstacle: What Is Missing

In an early essay outlining what she thinks a Nietzschean virtue theory might look like, Christine Swanton begins by saying, "Any virtue ethic needs to address at least the following two basic issues: (A) What makes an action right? (B) What makes a trait of character a virtue?"[3] But since there is nothing in Nietzsche's corpus to suggest that he intended to offer answers to either question, she is forced to carry out her discussion in terms of how she thinks Nietzsche *would* have answered them. This concession illustrates the first obstacle facing any virtue-theoretic reading of Nietzsche: namely, the absence of any explicit attempt to give a systematic account of any of the concepts that most contemporary proponents of virtue ethics regard as indispensable to a coherent and normatively successful theory (even taking into account that virtue ethicists can disagree about theoretical requirements). Nietzsche makes no clear effort to define 'virtue', for instance, or to tell us what virtue in general consists in; nor do we find in his works any clear account of the virtuous individual or the nature of virtuous action.

In Swanton's attempt to supply Nietzsche with an answer to her first question, she goes well beyond the texts, even attributing to Nietzsche theses that are plainly incompatible with them. Consider, for instance, how the account of "right action" she claims to be able to extract from Nietzsche's work introduces the concept of

[2] Many thanks to Jennifer Daigle, who pressed me to emphasize this point in particular, and to Mark Migotti for their many generous and insightful comments and helpful suggestions for improvement. I first presented these arguments at a workshop on "Nietzsche and Virtue" at the University of Guelph in October 2013. I would like to thank all the participants of that workshop for their comments and questions, especially John Hacker-Wright, both for organizing the workshop and also for pointing me toward some especially helpful contemporary work on virtue ethics, including his own. See, e.g., "Virtue Ethics Without Right Action," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 44 (2010): 209–24.

[3] Christine Swanton, "Outline of a Nietzschean Virtue Ethics," *International Studies in Philosophy* 30.3 (1998): 29–38; p. 29. See also, in the same journal issue, Michael Slote, "Nietzsche and Virtue Ethics" (pp. 23–27) and Lester Hunt, "Why Democracy is an Enemy of Virtue" (pp. 13–21); all three papers were originally presented at a 1996 North American Nietzsche Society group session on Nietzsche and virtue.

'virtue'. On Swanton's reading, Nietzsche thinks that "the virtuousness of the motive is both a necessary and sufficient condition of rightness of the action that flows from it."[4] Nietzsche nowhere says anything of this sort, and the only appropriate response to this interpretive claim, it seems to me, is an incredulity that should not be mitigated by the textual support she offers for it. Swanton appeals to two passages (*BGE* 32 and *GM* I:13), both of which do more to undermine than to bolster her case.

To demonstrate that Nietzsche espouses her criterion of right action, for instance, Swanton says, "For Nietzsche, in short, it is the 'origin' of an action that 'decides its value' (*BGE* 32)."[5] But in this passage of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche attributes this misbegotten claim to deontologists, who have managed to overcome one egregious error—that of supposing that the value of an action is determined by its consequences—only to install a "disastrous new superstition" in its place: namely, that behind every action is an "intention" to which we should look to determine the value of an action. By contrast, Nietzsche says, "we immoralists, at least, suspect that the decisive value is conferred by what is specifically *unintentional* about an action […] and that all its intentionality […] only belongs to its surface or skin" (*BGE* 32). The "morality of intentions" to which Swanton makes reference he derides as "a prejudice, a precipitousness, perhaps a preliminary, a thing on about the same level as astrology and alchemy, but in any case something that must be overcome" (*ibid.*). The *Genealogy* passage makes a related point, about the misconceptions we harbor about agents and how those errors are ossified in moral theory. "For just as common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a *doing*, as an effect of a subject called lighting," Nietzsche says, "so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express its strength—or not to. But there is no such substratum […]" (*GM* I:13). Swanton appeals to this idea, too, in her attempt to ground the claim that what makes an action virtuous is what is "within" the agent. But her explanation requires her to *maintain* the very conceptual separation between "agent" and "motive" that Nietzsche is *rejecting* in this important passage—and thereby to commit the very mistake he describes.

In short, Swanton's account of "Nietzschean" right action would commit Nietzsche to a theory of action he thinks is untenable. In a number of passages, he raises serious worries about the nature of conscious willing (i.e., about "motives" and "intentions"), its transparency, its regularity, and its causal efficacy. No matter how one reads these passages, it is clear that Nietzsche's view of the relationship between willing and deliberating, on the one hand, and acting, on the other hand, cannot support reliable explanations of our behavior in the way it would have to in order to serve as Swanton's evaluative criterion of action. Furthermore, although Swanton recognizes that Nietzsche's moral psychology—according to which motives and intentions are not transparent to agents—complicates the picture she

[4] Swanton, "Outline," p. 31.

[5] Swanton, "Outline," p. 31.

wants to paint,[6] she fails to appreciate to what extent. Nietzsche takes us to be largely "unknown to ourselves" (*GM* P:1). In *Daybreak*, he ridicules the "*unknown world of the 'subject'*," where "actions are *never* what they appear to us to be! […] and all actions are *essentially* unknown" (*D* 116, emphasis added). And "that as one observes or recollects *any* action, it is and remains *impenetrable*; that our opinions about 'good' and 'noble' and 'great' can never be *proven true* by our actions because every act is *unknowable*" (*GS* 335, emphasis added). Unfortunately, the more inscrutable our motives and desires become, and the more we recognize that they probably belong to the unconscious, the worse things get for Swanton's account.[7] A necessary and sufficient criterion of the rightness of action that is wholly inscrutable to agents themselves—and there is excellent reason to think Nietzsche takes us to be so opaque—is not a very helpful criterion, if it counts as a criterion at all.

Finally, we should also bear in mind Nietzsche's own observation that the very idea of a causal connection between motives and actions becomes significant only in a context in which we're interested in getting moral guidance or making attributions of moral responsibility and evaluating actions for the sake of assigning praise and blame. It is those attributions that the notion of "intentions" arises to support, and the only ones who have a vested interest in supporting the connection at all are those committed to the values characteristic of slave morality. Swanton's attribution of this theory of "right action" to Nietzsche not only outstrips the textual support to fashion him into a moral philosopher—something he seems otherwise Hell-bent on not being, as we shall see in the next section—but it puts him in league with the ascetic ones.

To supply Nietzsche with an answer to her second question, what counts as a virtuous trait of character, Swanton goes further still, and with equally unacceptable results. She openly admits this will be a difficult question to answer on Nietzsche's behalf, not for the obvious reasons that Nietzsche does not seem to give the concept of a 'virtue' any sustained treatment, or that he is deeply suspicious that we have sufficient psychological stability to support identifiable traits of character at all, but rather for the reason that Nietzsche, "it turns out… apparently admires traits which are arguably sick, such as narcissistic grandiosity."[8] The remainder of her theory, which she develops but does not substantially revise in later works, is essentially constructed as an answer to the question she asks next, namely, "How can this be?"

Swanton is right to worry that if there is a virtue ethic to which Nietzsche can be committed, the list of virtues it is likely to generate will include several that sit uncomfortably with our civilized modern sensibilities, and that the portrait it develops of the ideal or virtuous type may not be one we are eager to recognize as "flourishing":

[6] Swanton, "Outline," p. 32.

[7] Robert Guay develops related concerns about how the complexity of our psychology and the radical instability of human "character" according to Nietzsche problematize the attempt to understand what he means when he refers to "our virtues" ("Our Virtues," *Philosophical Topics* 33.2 [2005]: 71–87). See also Guay's excellent review of Swanton's book in the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 31 (2006): 75–77.

[8] Swanton, "Outline," p. 33.

> Inasmuch as a determinate picture of the, or an, ideal type is discernible in Nietzsche, an exemplar of that type is depicted as a sad figure, for whom "marriage is a calamity," who follows in most cases "the path to unhappiness" (*GM* III:7), who leaves society so far behind that he "comes to grief" and "can't go back to the pity of men" (*BGE* 29). This does not look like a picture of eudaimonia […].[9]

Bizarrely, in Swanton's criticism of Nietzsche's "higher type" in this passage—inasmuch as it is discernible, as she says—she employs as criteria of evaluation many aspects of "the good" that Nietzsche's philosophy calls into question, here including even the bourgeois contentment of marriage as a measure of the goodness or success of a life! Setting aside for the moment the issue of the defensibility of such criteria, once employed, they will militate *against* our accepting as virtues many of the things Nietzsche seems in fact to applaud.

For instance, in her most recent work,[10] Swanton is determined to argue that Nietzsche condemns cruelty *as a vice*, lest it get included on the list of "arguably sick" traits of character he apparently supports. This interpretation is deeply problematic against the background of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, in which he argues that cruelty is a fundamental human instinct.[11] Swanton acknowledges this point, but she says we ought just to read Nietzsche instead as having thought that *aggressiveness*, not cruelty, is a fundamental human instinct; and aggressiveness, she contends, "constitutes part of the field of a virtue of proper assertiveness."[12] Problem solved. Unfortunately, however, there is no clear textual support *in Nietzsche* for the claim that by 'cruelty' [*Grausamkeit*] he always means merely "aggressiveness" of the sort that Freud reckoned to be part of the basic package of drives common to all human animals. Moreover, when he does discuss cruelty, he does not *obviously* condemn it.[13]

Rather than taking any of this to indicate that Nietzsche may not be a good candidate for a virtue theorist, Swanton posits what may be most aptly described as a "Bizarro World" virtue theory.[14] On this reading, Bizarro-Nietzsche is a

[9] Swanton, "Outline," p. 29.

[10] "Nietzsche and the Virtues of Mature Egoism," in Simon May (ed.), *Nietzsche's* On the Genealogy of Morality*: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 285–308.

[11] For a discussion of this claim about cruelty and its centrality to Nietzsche's critique of morals, see Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), chap. 7.

[12] Swanton, "Mature Egoism," p. 292.

[13] In *BGE* 14, Nietzsche muses, "We probably still have our virtues too, […] with all of our dangerous curiosity, our diversity and art of disguises, our worn-out and, as it were, saccharine cruelty in sense and in spirit,—*if* we happen to have virtues, they will presumably only be the ones that have learned best how to get along with our most secret and heartfelt propensities […]"; see *BGE* 44 and 229 for similar sentiments about cruelty and knowledge. *D* 18 and 369 appear to lend support to Swanton's mature view that cruelty is a virtue only for the very bad off; but cf. *D* 371, on the evil of the strong. Nietzsche's attitude to cruelty is more complex than Swanton's view allows.

[14] The "Bizarro World," properly known as "Htrae" ('Earth', spelled backwards), is a planet in the DC Comics universe. Created by Bizarro, the deformed clone of Superman, society on Htrae is ruled by the code, "Us do opposite of all Earthly things! Us hate beauty! Us love ugliness! Is big crime to make anything perfect on Bizarro World!" The first reference appears in *Action Comics*, vol. 1, no. 263 (New York, NY: Detective Comics, Inc., April 1960), written by Otto Binder, with artists Wayne Boring, Stan Kaye and Curt Swan.

Schopenhauerian pessimist who finds the world irredeemably bad and its inhabitants incurably sick;[15] but he is deeply concerned for them and their comfort, which apparently motivates him to develop an affirmative ethic that encourages them toward life-affirmation—the measure of a good life—and is intended to get them to love themselves.[16] Bad or otherwise undesirable character traits turn out to be good traits, then, in a sufficiently bad world.[17] In later work, Swanton responds to the problem of cruelty with a slightly modified but equally elaborate reading according to which, although Nietzsche *appears* to valorize the "noble morality" that condones cruelty and its zealous expressions, he does not do so in absolute terms, but only relative to slave morality, and then only with the qualification that the cruelty nobles express is an expression of their "immaturity" (or, more precisely, an "*immature* egoism"), which, Nietzsche advises, *everyone* ought to avoid.[18]

To say there is no strong textual support for these tortured interpretations is an understatement. Most troubling about them is that they invariably make Nietzsche precisely the sort of moralist and "improver of mankind" he constantly criticizes; we find him dispensing advice to the herd about how they "ought" to be and what they ought to do, and endorsing the very moral opposites he was supposed to be getting "beyond." On the topic of cruelty specifically, consider his exasperated lament in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "People should rethink their ideas about cruelty and open up their eyes; they should finally learn impatience, so that big, fat, presumptuous mistakes like this [i.e., the denial that human beings are by nature cruel and that all we call "higher culture" would not be possible without it] will stop wandering virtuously and audaciously about" (*BGE* 229).[19] If we find Nietzsche

[15] Swanton explains in a note that Nietzsche and Schopenhauer share a view about the ugly truths of human existence ("Outline," p. 37n1). Following Julian Young in *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), she clarifies that Nietzsche's "solution" to the problem of pessimism distinguishes him from Schopenhauer, but the ways in which she takes Nietzsche to be a pessimist seem to me to obscure the distinction ("Outline," pp. 29–30). Swanton's use of the term 'pessimism' utterly confounds Nietzsche's critique of it and of Schopenhauer.

[16] Swanton, "Outline," p. 31. This position is even more evident in "Mature Egoism," where Swanton's reading licenses the attribution to Nietzsche of various pieces of advice and a genuine concern for the well being of the herd: "If one is an average individual," she has Nietzsche say, "and is thus a member of the 'herd', as Nietzsche puts it, one must still avoid the vices of immature egoism…" (p. 289).

[17] See Philip Kain, "Nietzsche, Virtue, and the Horror of Existence," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17.1 (2009): 153–67, for a more sophisticated version of what seems to me to be the same interpretation: "For virtue to be compatible with happiness," Kain says, without reference to Swanton, "it is necessary that the individual acting virtuously fit the world. […] If to be happy, we must avoid knowing the truth, if we must conceal it, if we must lie about it, then the true and the good are not compatible" (p. 157). Thus, he concludes, "For Aristotle, if we develop a characteristic or power that works to hide the true, it would not be a virtue but a vice. […] If, however, the true is horrible, if it is terrible, then characteristics or powers that enable us to hide the true, characteristics that would normally be called vices, become virtues" (p. 164).

[18] Swanton, "Mature Egoism," pp. 292, 289. The quotes provided in support of this reading, all from *GM* I:11, bias the discussion and leave a number of important passages on "cruelty" unaccounted for. In addition to *BGE* 229, Swanton should consider passages in which Nietzsche connects "cruelty" with the knowledge drive that he attributes to himself and other "investigators to the point of cruelty" (*BGE* 44; see also *BGE* 214).

[19] This passage belongs to the seventh chapter of *BGE*, "Our Virtues," a difficult but important stretch of text that, so far as I am aware, Swanton never discusses.

issuing a condemnation of anything in this passage, it is not cruelty, but rather the reaction of those who squeamishly recoil from it and cannot see in it anything but vice or "immaturity."

In his book-length treatment of Nietzsche and virtue,[20] Lester Hunt is similarly forced to go beyond the texts to fill out his portrait of Nietzsche as a virtue theorist. Like Swanton, Hunt claims to find what Nietzsche never straightforwardly supplies, beginning with an account of virtue. According to Hunt, Nietzsche's "most general discussion of the nature of virtue" is to be found in Part I of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in the chapter, "On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions [*Von den Freuden- und Leidenschaften*]," and so he focuses his efforts on this cryptic stretch of text.[21] Here, he argues, Nietzsche offers a *definition* of virtue clear and robust enough to serve as the cornerstone of a theory that will allow us "even [to] give lists of the virtues that are the most important," lest we think "Nietzsche is unable to supply us with procedures for distinguishing virtues from non-virtues."[22]

In *Zarathustra*, Hunt says, we find Nietzsche engaged in advancing a theory according to which what begin as *passions*, which one might take to be "to some extent incompatible with human power and freedom," undergo a "liberating transformation" to *become virtues* "that may be instruments of freedom and power."[23] Passions, it seems to me, occupy a different conceptual category from virtues, and it is never made quite clear what sort of alchemy it takes to magic one into the other.[24] According to Hunt, though, "Passions become virtues," or perhaps the having of certain regular or lasting or defining passions ought to be considered "virtuous," "when they contribute to the pursuit of one's highest goal."[25] The appeal to our activity as goal-directed then suggests to Hunt that "we can most easily achieve lucidity about what this connection is [between "overcoming," destruction and creation in *Zarathustra*] by going directly to a discussion of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power. "As we shall soon see," he promises, "the

[20] Lester Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[21] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 70. I am unsure what Hunt means by the claim that this is Nietzsche's most general discussion of virtue. Treating it that way requires our setting aside, for some reason, the whole of *BGE* Part VII (which, since "virtues" are mentioned in the title, seems the more direct, if not necessarily the less rocky, road) and, e.g., *HH* I and II, which together contain over 30 passages about virtue, as well as *GS*, which contains about 32 passages dealing with virtue. *D*, *BGE* and *TI* each have more passages that make reference to 'virtue' than *Z* I, in which the short section examined by Hunt is one of over a dozen at which one might have looked to make sense of the concept. Why this particular section garners the attention it does, then, remains unclear to me.

[22] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 79. Since Hunt does not generate a list, Brian Leiter argues that "it is not clear that [Hunt's] account makes Nietzsche a virtue theorist of much practical or philosophical help," since he "gives almost none of the detail about particular virtues that interest most contemporary writers […], even relegating Nietzsche's own specific virtue lists to an endnote" ("Nietzsche and the Morality Critics," *Ethics* 107 [1997]: 250–85, pp. 261–62n27).

[23] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, pp. 70–71.

[24] Even Aristotle would be similarly skeptical: See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Ch. 5 for a lengthy discussion of the distinction between virtues and passions. The passions (e.g., shame) can be efficacious in virtue-formation, and they can be virtuous or vicious, but they are not themselves virtues or vices. Thanks again to Jennifer Daigle for suggesting this point to me.

[25] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 71.

'overcoming' that [Nietzsche] says is involved in the creation of virtue *is the same thing as* the will to power."[26]

Here, we must remember that unless we help ourselves liberally to material Nietzsche chose not to publish, there is no sense to be made of the "will to power" beyond a psychological principle that helps to explain animal behavior, and human behavior insofar as we are, after all, animals. Thus I am skeptical about the extent to which "we can most easily achieve lucidity" about the still-nebulous concepts of virtue, passion and overcoming in Part I of *Zarathustra* by appeal to the even more nebulous "doctrine" of the will to power. In addition, in order to accept Hunt's definition of Nietzschean "virtue," we must also be open to taking the character Zarathustra's oracular pronouncements as *claims* the propositional content of which can be fairly straightforwardly represented and attributed to Nietzsche as *his views*, for which he uses the text, *Zarathustra*, to *argue*. This is a contentious position, which at the very least stands in need of further defense.

Other commentators have been tempted to similarly extreme measures in their efforts to grow an affirmative morality out of Nietzsche's unsystematic and scattershot remarks on virtue and vice. Although it is scarcely noticed in the relevant literature, I believe the first of these many attempts to find in Nietzsche an ethic of virtue—or, failing to find it, to furnish him with one—is Robert Solomon's 1985 essay, "A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics."[27] Juxtaposing Kant's ethics of rules and categorical principles with Aristotle's "ethics of *practice*," drawing our attention (quite rightly) to a number of similarities between Nietzsche's and Aristotle's outlook on things, and reminding us of Nietzsche's concern for the creation of new values, Solomon says:

> What I want to argue here should be, in part at least, transparent. Nietzsche may talk about "*creating new values*," but—as he himself often says, it is something of a return to an old and neglected set of values—*the values of masterly virtue*—that most concerns him. There are complications. We do not have the ethos of *The Illiad*, nor even the tamer *ethe* of Homer or Aristotle…. There is no context, in other words, within which *the new virtues we are to*

[26] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 71 (emphasis added).

[27] *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 16 (1985): 250–67. It is a strikingly peculiar feature of the literature on Nietzsche and virtue that almost every contributor to it seems to be laboring under the misapprehension that he or she is the first or only one to hit upon the idea of connecting the two. There is no citation of Solomon's "Severe Morality" in Hunt's book or in Christine Swanton's "Outline," or "Mature Egoism." Nor does she cite this paper in her book, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), or in "Nietzschean Virtue Ethics," in Christa Davis-Acampora (ed.), *Nietzsche's* On the Genealogy of Morals*: Critical Essays* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 291–304, although she twice cites later work by Solomon. See Solomon, "Nietzsche's Virtues," in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123–48. In addition, Swanton mentions Hunt only briefly and not substantively in "Outline" and "Mature Egoism," but not at all in "Nietzschean Virtue Ethics"; and although his book appears in the bibliography of her book, there is no explicit engagement with his view. In her latest essay, she also misses Kain, "Nietzsche, Virtue and the Horror of Existence," which itself includes a citation to just about everyone in the literature *except Swanton*, to whose views his own are strikingly similar. Thomas Brobjer also manages to overlook Solomon's essay, *and a good deal more*, as we shall see below. Thanks to Paul Loeb for drawing my attention both to Solomon's original contribution and to this odd state of the art at a 2008 North American Nietzsche Society group meeting in Pasadena, CA, where he presented his own essay, "Posthuman Virtue Ethics: Nietzsche Beyond Aristotle."

> *"create"* are to be virtues, for a virtue without a practice is of no more value than a word without a language, a gesture without a context.[28]

In the rest of his essay, Solomon turns his attention to solving the problem of context, but what I find striking about this passage is the way Nietzsche's demand for the creation of new *values*, which we find everywhere in his work, is casually rephrased as a demand for the creation of new *virtues*. Values and virtues may, naturally enough, be connected, but in this passage the connection is presupposed rather than drawn. And unfortunately, if we reject the substitution of one term for another, on which the remainder of Solomon's essay appears to be predicated, then there is little support for his version of the virtue-theoretic reading.

Solomon's reading also conflates a stronger and a weaker statement of Nietzsche's attitude toward the Greeks and toward the "master morality" of the first essay of the *Genealogy*, which is supposed to provide whatever *content* Nietzsche's "*aretaic* ethics" will have, in order to fill in in some significant gaps. Nietzsche admires the Greeks. But we will not find any support for the claim that Nietzsche thinks *admiration* warrants *emulation*. Quite the contrary, like his German Romantic predecessors, Nietzsche takes our recognition of the greatness of Hellenic culture to leave us in a precarious situation precisely because he recognizes that nostalgia is an unhealthy condition to live in, and because he sees that we cannot go back: their values would just as soon kill us all as make us any stronger. Solomon appreciates this to some extent, of course, which is why he reads Nietzsche as encouraging the creation of *new* values (virtues) appropriate to our time and place. Ultimately, though, his formulation of the ethics he takes Nietzsche to be developing would commit us to something much stronger: "Aristotle and Achilles versus Kant and Christianity."[29] But this slogan would situate Nietzsche squarely in the black-and-white, comic-strip world of 'good' and 'evil' that he so clearly aimed to oppose.

Finally, in Thomas Brobjer's 2003 article, "Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality: An Ethics of Virtue,"[30] we find the same contradiction and a similar substitution of stronger for weaker—and more plausible (but not less interesting)—theses in Nietzsche's work. Since he apparently takes himself to be the only one to have had the idea that Nietzsche offers a positive ethics best articulated as a virtue theory,[31]

[28] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 255 (emphases added).

[29] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 256.

[30] *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 26 (2003): 64–78; see also Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Ethics of Character* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1995).

[31] As Christine Daigle keenly observes, Brobjer says twice that the connection between Nietzsche and virtue ethics "has not yet been realized" until he realized it! See Daigle, "Nietzsche: Virtue Ethics… Virtue Politics?," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 32 (2006): 1–21, p. 16n1, citing Brobjer, "Affirmative Morality," pp. 64, 74. In addition to Solomon's "Severe Morality," Brobjer manages to neglect at least Hunt's "Democracy" and *Origin of Virtue*, Swanton's "Outline," and Slote's "Nietzsche and Virtue Ethics." Where Brobjer describes Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as "a modern version of the Greek gods" ("Affirmative Morality," p. 67), cf. Walter Kaufmann's "Aristotelian" reading of Nietzsche in *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974/1950, see esp. pp. 382–84), which is taken up at length by Bernd Magnus in "Aristotle and Nietzsche: *Megalopsychia* and *Übermensch*," in David J. Depew (ed.), *Greeks and the Good Life* (Fullerton, CA: California State University Press, 1980), 260–95. In the scholarship on Nietzsche and virtue, however, this is par for the course; see note 27, above.

Brobjer dooms himself to repeating many of the mistakes of the past. In the service of inflating Nietzsche's affirmative attitude toward Hellenic culture into a full-blown moral theory, he is willing to equivocate: "It is well known that Nietzsche rejects the idea of philosophical systems as being in any sense true or valuable per se. Hence *he rejects all attempts at systematization*. I will not dispute this claim as such, *but Nietzsche does nonetheless, in a sense, believe in the existence of 'systems'*."[32] Furthermore, Brobjer acknowledges initially (and rightly) that Nietzsche "rejects the belief in moral opposites," but he nevertheless says that on Nietzsche's view, "acts will not so much be regarded as good or evil, or right or wrong, but will be judged rather as worthy or unworthy, or sometimes more directly related to character traits (virtues), for example, as brave, dishonest, or unjust."[33] And, more consistently and even more visibly than in some other cases, his reading conflates stronger and weaker formulations of Nietzsche's views: Brobjer gets basically right, for instance, that "the fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's moral judgment and thinking is his concern and emphasis of personality and character," but then he simply says, "I call this aspect an *ethics of character*, but it could also be called an ethics of virtue."[34] Similarly, his claim that "Nietzsche, like the Greeks, wanted to set up personality, character, or 'the most successful exemplars' as ideals" is a stronger version of the more accurate view that both Nietzsche and many Greek thinkers he admired were more interested in character and personality than in principles and propositions.[35]

## 3 The Second Obstacle: Nietzsche's "Immoralism"

Not only does Nietzsche refuse to aid and abet virtue-theoretic readers of his texts; he works aggressively, it seems, to confound them. By declaring himself, without qualification, an opponent of morality and by adopting the moniker "immoralist," Nietzsche signals his refusal to contribute yet another "*majestic moral structure*" to the long history of failed attempts to erect them (*D* P:3). Rather, he describes his project in *Daybreak* in quite sweeping terms; his aim, which he describes as "immoral," is "to criticize morality itself, to regard morality as a problem, as problematic" (*D* P:3). And in the preface to the *Genealogy*, he claims that, where he asks questions, "the belief in morality, all morality, totters" (*GM* P:6). Lester Hunt concedes early on in his analysis that "the exact nature of [Nietzsche's] immoralism is quite problematic."[36] At times, he says, Nietzsche's claims to be an immoralist sound "extreme," as if Nietzsche means to provide "an alternative to *the moral way*

[32] Brobjer, "Affirmative Morality," p. 69 (emphases added).

[33] Brobjer, "Affirmative Morality," pp. 65, 72.

[34] Brobjer, "Affirmative Morality," p. 66. Cf. Kain, "Horror of Existence," pp. 164–65: "Nietzsche is definitely committed to a virtue ethic. He attends to characteristics, dispositions and powers that he wants developed in individuals (at least some individuals) […]."

[35] Brobjer, "Affirmative Morality," p. 67.

[36] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, pp. 7–8.

*of thinking as such*."[37] That, of course, would render moot the strenuous efforts to read Nietzsche as endorsing a moral theory.

Some readers simply ignore this problem. Interpreting Nietzsche as a virtue-minded philosopher "who has something to offer substantive moral theory,"[38] Christine Swanton effectively denies (primarily by omission) that Nietzsche's "immoralism," his campaign against morality in general, troubles her interpretative approach. Nowhere does she appear to recognize it as a serious obstacle to reading him as a substantive moralist,[39] and so she never genuinely doubts that there is an affirmative ethic to be wrung from Nietzsche's texts. By reading quite selectively, and by treating the texts in piecemeal fashion, she altogether avoids the question of why her reading of Nietzsche is so at odds with the various self-descriptions and "mission statements" we find in, say, Nietzsche's (1886) prefaces, where he characterizes his project as an attack on all morality. Swanton does not accord these passages due consideration, and although she mentions she does not quote or discuss at any length Nietzsche's self-attributions of "immoralism."

Lester Hunt acknowledges more appropriately the depth of the problem. His solution turns on the claim that Nietzsche uses the term 'immoralism' sometimes in a more and sometimes in a less restrictive way, which is surely true.[40] But he does not subject the less restrictive passages to close scrutiny. Instead, he suggests we begin altogether elsewhere. Reasoning that the opposite of "immoralism" is "moralism," or "morality," he begins by examining what Nietzsche says about the latter (morality), and then attempts to develop an understanding of immoralism via *negativa*. After rehearsing Nietzsche's critiques of the concept of responsibility, of morality's ambition to make prescriptions about the way things "ought" to be, independently of how they are, of the belief in "opposite values," and of the mutually dependent concepts of disinterestedness and universality, Hunt says: "Taken together, these ideas constitute an elaborate definition of a familiar sense of the word 'morality'. More specifically, anyone who knows the history of philosophy should immediately recognize that they represent Immanuel Kant's conception of 'morality'."[41] Hunt therefore posits a distinction, between little-'m' "morality" and big-'M' "Morality," and argues that Nietzsche rejects only the latter, which turns out to be Kantian morality. Thus he concludes, "we can see now that there is no

[37] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 7 (emphasis added).

[38] Swanton, "Mature Egoism," p. 285.

[39] In her most recent work, Swanton has finally acknowledged that Nietzsche's identification of himself as an "immoralist" may be a "major obstacle" to her reading ("Mature Egoism," p. 285). But in her view, there is no contradiction between Nietzsche's being an immoralist and his having substantive moral commitments (i.e., "egoism," which itself sits somewhat uncomfortably with virtue ethics), as long as they are of the right sort. Thus, she proposes to read Nietzsche as a "mature" egoist. How the mature-immature distinction is supposed to address the potential problem that Nietzsche's rejection of morality is a *wholesale* rejection, however, remains opaque; the *sophistication* of the moral views attributed to him really is not the issue. She makes no further effort to tackle the incompatibility problem, but instead directs the reader in a footnote to "explicitly compatibilist" readings by Robert Solomon, Frijhof Bergman and Richard Schacht.

[40] See, e.g., *D* P:3, 4; *HH* P:1; *WS* 19; *GS* 346; *BGE* 32; *TI* "Arrows" 36, "Morality" 3, 6, "Errors" 7, and "Skirmishes" 32; *EH* "Destiny" 2–4, 6.

[41] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, pp. 22–23.

inconsistency in admiring some moralities while attacking Morality as such. Morality, in the capitalized sense, is a very distinctive sort of code […].”[42]

There are at least two serious problems with this reading. For one thing, we should be deeply suspicious of a reading that allows “morality” to be so easily *specified*; Nietzsche does not have so monolithic an image of morality. He is interested in it as a powerful social force and cultural phenomenon, and his later works especially concern themselves with the many guises and manifestations of morality in human culture—in science, in the arts, in a wide variety of secular and not obviously philosophical enterprises. Consider how very odd it would be if the author of the *Genealogy* and the innovator of the method of investigation employed there, the man who writes that “only that which has no history is definable” (*GM* II:13), were here to abandon his rich conception of human practices and their metamorphosis over time, and adopt an uncomplicated conception of the phenomenon that remains the focal point of his interests—namely, Kantian morality, neatly axiomatized. Among other things, Hunt’s interpretation would reduce Nietzsche to a critic of moral philosophy quite narrowly circumscribed, rather than a critic of *morality*, as he describes himself. This reading requires us to deny to Nietzsche the complexity he finds in the very phenomena in which he is most interested.

The second problem is one Hunt sees and attempts to forestall; namely, that his conclusion will “trivialize Nietzsche’s immoralism into an attack on Kant.”[43] He replies, in effect, that while many thinkers reject this or that feature of Kantian morality, Nietzsche stands apart by rejecting *all* its central tenets, which is a position radically critical of the philosophical orthodoxy: since most ethical philosophers today accept various of these tenets, “what Nietzsche attacks is what these philosophers believe in.”[44] But even this is a serious understatement, impossible to reconcile with Nietzsche’s dramatic characterizations of his project and its ramifications: “I know my lot,” Nietzsche says, “One day my name will be connected with the memory of something tremendous,—a crisis such as the earth has never seen, […] a decision made *against* everything that has been believed, demanded, held sacred so far. I am not a human being, I am dynamite” (*EH* “Destiny” 1). Be one ever so sharply critical of Immanuel Kant and his theory of morality, it is hard to believe that one’s stance would make one candidate for “the most terrible human being who has ever existed,” or “the *destroyer par excellence*” (*EH* “Destiny” 2). And yet, Nietzsche declares that he is “a world-historical monster”: “I am, in Greek, and not just in Greek, the *Anti-Christ*…” (*EH* “Books” 2). In the face of declarations like these, Hunt demurs, and straightforwardly denies: “There is likely to be at least one instance in which he is simply not choosing his words as carefully as he usually does.”[45] Hunt’s reading thus requires that we deny that Nietzsche means what he says in any of these (many) passages.

[42] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 23.

[43] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 23.

[44] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 23.

[45] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 8.

The same reading is advanced by Robert Solomon. In his original essay, he commits himself almost a priori, and for reasons I shall examine below, to the notion that there is an affirmative morality in Nietzsche. Thus, he is all but forced to say that Nietzsche's "immoralist" critique is "misinterpreted as a broad-based rejection of *all* morality (for example, by Philippa Foot, who is one of Nietzsche's more sensitive Anglo-American readers)."[46] But, we might ask incredulously, how can this claim—that the scope of Nietzsche's intended critique is "*all*" morality—be a *misinterpretation* of what Nietzsche says if it is *what Nietzsche says*? Solomon's answer is that we ought not take Nietzsche at his word; simply put, "to write about Nietzsche as a literal 'immoralist' and the destroyer of morality is to read him badly, or it is to confuse the appearance with the personality. Or, [Nietzsche] would say, it is to be a 'dolt'."[47] What of Nietzsche's well-documented ambition to undertake the transvaluation of *all* values? "Over-reaching nonsense," says Solomon![48] "And as for 'the tradition', as it has come to be called, Nietzsche as philosopher can be understood only within it, despite his unself-critical megalomania about his own 'untimely' and wholly novel importance."[49] Apparently, Nietzsche's problem is "that he sees himself as a destroyer, not a reformer or revisionist."[50] So, although Solomon starts off bristling at the "rather systematic whitewashing of Nietzsche" to which he says we have been treated in recent years,[51] it is curiously difficult to see the radical—not to say, "rabid"—firebrand Nietzsche behind the now toothless immoralism of this "good old enlightenment critic."[52] Indeed, according to Solomon, "it would not be wrong…to see Nietzsche as an old-fashioned moralist, disgusted with the world around him but unable to provide a satisfactory account of an alternative and unable to find a context in which an alternative could be properly cultivated."[53] "Nietzsche's nihilism," as he calls it, is basically just a reaction against the "hollowness" of modern moral philosophy generally; more specifically, it is "a reaction against a quite particular *conception* of morality, summarized in modern times in the ethics of Kant."[54]

Again, then, we see that in order to make Nietzsche's immoralism compatible with any serious commitment to an affirmative ethical theory, we must either dismiss or liberally rewrite a good deal of what he actually says, or else we must ignore whatever sounds to our ears implausible, or untoward or grandiose, or that

[46] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 259.

[47] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 258. Solomon has in mind *BGE* 226; Nietzsche's "immoralism" is only an appearance, on Solomon's reading, and as Nietzsche says in this passage, "We always have the dolts and the appearances against us."

[48] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 256.

[49] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 251.

[50] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 265.

[51] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 250.

[52] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 253.

[53] Solomon, "Severe Morality," pp. 265–66.

[54] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 256.

stands in the way of our unearthing, or even fabricating, Nietzsche's "ethical teachings." At this point, one must surely begin to suspect that, philologically speaking, things have taken a calamitous turn. How did this happen? I think Solomon's essay is suggestive of an answer. His attribution of an ethic of virtue to Nietzsche is framed as a response to the dilemma that he says Alasdair MacIntyre's book, *After Virtue*, forced upon us: "Nietzsche or Aristotle?"[55]

> There is, [MacIntyre] explicitly warns us, no third alternative. MacIntyre sees Nietzsche's philosophy as purely destructive, despite the fact that he praises the arch-destroyer for his insight into the collapse of morals that had been increasingly evident since the Enlightenment. MacIntryre chooses Aristotle as the positive alternative. Aristotle had an *ethos*; Nietzsche leaves us with nothing. [But] MacIntyre, by opposing Nietzsche and Aristotle, closes off to us the basis upon which we could best reconceive morality: a reconsideration of Aristotle through Nietzschean eyes.[56]

It is that reconsideration that Solomon undertakes in his essay. His conclusion, *contra* MacIntyre, is that not only is there "in Nietzsche, unmistakably, an ethics," but it is "an ethics that is very much part of 'the tradition'."[57] I applaud Solomon's (under-appreciated) efforts to rescue Nietzsche from MacIntyre's rather ham-fisted treatment of him, but I want to suggest that we need not go as far as Solomon does to accomplish it.

Essentially, I believe Solomon goes wrong in accepting MacIntyre's terms of debate. MacIntyre identifies *immoralism*, the heading under which Nietzsche opposes "*all* morality, morality as such," as a kind of *nihilism*. Solomon wants, quite sensibly, to deny that Nietzsche is a nihilist. But he accepts MacIntyre's presupposition that to demolish morality without installing something in its place is to be a nihilist; the only alternatives are to embrace (affirmative) moralism or succumb to (dangerous) nihilism. Thus, it looks like we will have to deny that "immoralism" means what Nietzsche says it does and be willing to go well beyond his texts to supply him with a moral theory, if we are to avoid the dour assessment that Nietzsche's thought leads us "to nothing substantial at all."[58] Fortunately for Nietzsche's readers, I think, this dilemma is a false one.[59]

[55] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), chap. 9.

[56] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 260.

[57] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 251.

[58] Solomon, "Severe Morality," p. 259.

[59] Nor is Solomon the only one to accept it. Having reviewed some of Nietzsche's most audacious remarks about immoralism, Thomas Brobjer asks, "After such an extreme critique and rejection of morality and the presuppositions of morality, can Nietzsche be anything other than a nihilist? Can he possibly have an affirmative morality?" ("Affirmative Morality," p. 66) The way he frames the question shows that he too accepts the false dilemma on which the bulk of the literature is predicated: Nietzsche must either have a system to offer or else be a nihilist.

## 4 Good Philology

The obstacles to a virtue theoretic reading discussed in the preceding sections have compelled virtue theorists to adopt creative interpretive tactics. At the outset, Lester Hunt, in his book, warns us that: "The process by which we come to understand Nietzsche includes, as a part of it, one in which we subject him to a test. Thus it may also represent the beginning of a process which results in our *denying him* and *going beyond him*."[60] And we have found instances of both denial and excess in the literature.

The pitfalls in these interpretations can be avoided, however, if only we strive to be the "good readers" of his works that Nietzsche demands: "the sort of reader I deserve," he says, "reads me as good old philologists read their Horace" (*EH* "Books" 5),[61] which is to say creatively, but also with patience, subtlety and caution. Instead of the twin principles of denial and excess, we should cultivate what we might call the philological virtues. For instance, we should at least begin by assuming that Nietzsche says what he means to say. Here, I am proposing that we do precisely what Solomon says we ought *not* to do—that is, that we read him literally and that we abandon the literal reading only when the text cannot be made sense of any other way. Obviously, we can't take him literally all the time; that would both distort the texts and take a good deal of the pleasure out of reading Nietzsche. But judicious application of this principle ought to keep Nietzsche's puns and jokes, his ironies and allusions, that is, his *style*, perfectly well intact; we *have to be* sensitive to his use of those literary devices or we stand to miss a good deal of what makes Nietzsche's works valuable. To the extent that we care what Nietzsche thought, however, I think we are obliged (i) to read what he says (especially in those texts that he intended for publication), (ii) to take it seriously, and (iii) to try to understand what it means, *on its own terms*.

By that last qualification, I mean to suggest that we should assume the texts are complete unless we have clear reasons to suppose otherwise and, by all means, refrain from "supplying" Nietzsche with theories he does not himself make any attempt to develop.[62] The virtue-theoretic readings of Nietzsche are all reconstructions, but it is well worth pausing to ask why a reconstruction is called for. Reconstruction is something we must do in cases where a text is obviously incomplete or for some other reason fails to make sense on its own; the fragmentary nature of the extant texts of the pre-Platonic philosophers, for instance, makes anything but a reconstructive approach to interpretation impossible. But I am far from convinced that such an approach is licensed, much less required in the case of Nietzsche, whose published works are anything but fragmentary.

[60] Hunt, *Origin of Virtue*, p. 5 (emphasis added).

[61] On "good philology," see also *A* 52; *GM* III:9; *TI* "Germans" 6.

[62] It is sometimes argued that reconstruction of an historical text is warranted in order to make it more relevant or philosophically interesting to contemporary scholars. I am unconvinced that this rationale is ever a very good one, but it is in any case unnecessary here since, as we will see, Nietzsche's "immoralism" is subtle and philosophically interesting in its own right.

My skepticism about what warrants the radically reconstructive approach commentators have taken, in fact, leads me to wonder whether another aspect of what motivates it—one that may explain the widespread acceptance of what I have described as a false dilemma—is something like an a priori determination to find, perhaps for idiosyncratic psychological reasons, a set of Nietzschean "ethical teachings." That is to say, even scholars of Nietzsche's thought seem to have yielded to the powerful desire for moral guidance, though I believe what Nietzsche asks us to imagine is the possibility of overcoming that very desire. Thus, he does not tell us—nor is there any reason to think he takes it to be his job to tell us—how to think about cruelty or immorality or virtue or value or anything else. His task is difficult enough; namely, to get us to "rethink" it and to stop taking for granted that its meaning and value are obvious, and to undermine our "faith" in morality, *but without putting something in its place*.

Two objections will surely be made at this point. One is that it is not possible psychologically to live without moral commitments of some description or other. The other is that even if it is possible, Nietzsche certainly does not do it. How, one might ask, are we to make sense of the evaluative remarks he makes with such violent emphasis if he has no such commitments? When commentators ask this question, they seem to me to presuppose the necessary existence of a background theory in light of which his strong evaluative expressions are to be explained and justified, lest they be mere "opinions" or "preferences," or expressions of "taste." But this is just how Nietzsche himself so often describes them (e.g., *GM* P:2; *BGE* 186, 267). The presupposition is that there must be a thread that pulls them all together; otherwise they exert no pressure on our own views. Here, it is interesting to consider an analogy: when faced with the fact of tremendous suffering in the world, the religious believer is faced with two tasks—the explanation and the justification of that suffering in light of the fact of God's existence. These are the twin tasks of any theodicy. What we find in the literature on Nietzsche and virtue is a number of commentators laboring away at the construction of a theodicy for (i.e., an explanation for the rationality of) Nietzsche's evaluations of us and our situation. That behavior is entirely predictable on Nietzsche's own psychological account, but its persistence in the scholarship on Nietzsche demonstrates nothing so clearly as that we have failed to grasp the ramifications of that account and, indeed, that the landscape he so desired to alter has remained unchanged.

Of course there are many things Nietzsche clearly prefers and values, and there are many more things for which he expresses disdain or contempt; many traits he praises as "virtues" and many other traditional vices that he provocatively champions. And he is well aware that we, too, will always have our evaluations of things; it is a natural psychological fact about human beings that we are the "evaluating animals *par excellence*." But a great deal of this valuing and disvaluing can go on without our having an overarching theory that either generates the value judgments or justifies them. Nietzsche seems to think (perhaps correctly) that the need for moral guidance or a procedure for generating value judgments—or rules for action, or lists of virtues, or criteria for identifying the virtuous individual—arises only where humans have utterly lost their way and are incapable of making value judgments and prioritizing values on their own. In other words, on Nietzsche's

view, the need for a justificatory principle arises only where humans either do not know or cannot trust themselves to issue judgments otherwise. *That* hopeless condition is nihilism: it is humanity's loss of faith in itself, and it is very often just staved off by our placing that faith in someone or something else. Thus, one of the chief symptoms of this nihilistic condition is what Nietzsche variously calls the old, familiar "metaphysical need"[63] or our "need to believe."

What Nietzsche is suggesting is that our own reluctance to value and disvalue in the absence of a theory to which to appeal is itself symptomatic of an illness. In light of this, I find it difficult not to read *Gay Science* 347 as a kind of statement on the scholarship dedicated to uncovering and codifying Nietzsche's own "severe morality":

> How much one needs a *faith* in order to flourish, how much that is "firm" and that one does not wish to be shaken because one *clings* to it, that is a measure of the degree of one's strength (or, to put the point more clearly, of one's weakness). […] For this is how man is: An article of faith could be refuted before him a thousand times—if he needed it, he would consider it "true" again and again […]. Metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is that impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form. The demand that one *wants* by all means that something should be firm (while on account of the ardor of this demand one is easier and more negligent about the demonstration of this certainty)—this, too, is still the demand for a support, a prop, in short, that *instinct of weakness* which, to be sure, does not create religious, metaphysical systems, and convictions of all kinds but—conserves them. […] Faith is always coveted most and needed most urgently where will is lacking; for will, as the affect of command, is the decisive sign of sovereignty and strength. In other words, the less one knows how to command, the more urgently one covets someone who commands severely—a god, prince, class, physician, father confessor, dogma or party conscience. (*GS* 347)[64]

Nietzsche's appeal to the "ardor" of the demand for something firm, certain, principled—for a theory—suggests an argument to the best explanation for the easy negligence of some of the interpretations we have examined.

If we return to the false dilemma, "Nietzsche *or* Aristotle," we should be able to see better that taking Nietzsche's side seriously need not mean transmogrifying Nietzsche

[63] See, e.g., *BGE* 10, 12; *HH* 37; and *GS* 151.

[64] He puts the point more succinctly in *Twilight of the Idols*: "I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" (*TI* "Arrows" 26). It is worth noting that this is not an isolated comment in Nietzsche's works. The expression of mistrust [*Ich misstraue allen Systematikern*], directed at not some, but at all "systematizers," and accompanied by the vow to "avoid them" by going his own way, appears in *TI* and nearly verbatim in four notebook passages from the same period (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke* [KGW], eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari [Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1967–], *Nachgelassene Fragmente Herbst 1887* 9[188], *Nov. 1887–März 1888* 11[410], *Frühjahr 1888* 15[118], *Juli–Aug. 1888* 18[4]). And the same sentiment is expressed in *D* 318: "*Beware of systematizers!*—Systematizers practice a kind of play-acting: in as much as they want to fill out a system and round off its horizon, they have to try to present their weaker qualities in the same style as their stronger—they try to impersonate whole and uniformly strong natures."

into Aristotle's modern cousin. In my view, Nietzsche's critical work does, in the end, "leave us with nothing," just as Solomon says MacIntyre charged, but that does not make him a *nihilist* in the pernicious sense. Human beings have long wondered what is the best kind of life for man, what it means to live a flourishing or valuable life, what we ought to do. But Nietzsche points out that for over two millennia we've been producing theories no one of which is clearly superior to the others. Perhaps—just perhaps—there has been something wrong with the attempt. Nietzsche's immoralism expresses what is perhaps an ambitious hope for himself and a challenge to us to imagine that one may at the same time reject morality *as such*, *all* morality, and yet not be a nihilist. This is to read Nietzsche as Hunt suggests we might, though he ultimately thinks we ought not, as intending to provide "an alternative to *the moral way of thinking as such*." This challenge follows upon what is perhaps Nietzsche's most important discovery: that the entire enterprise of philosophizing about morality is itself an irreducibly moral enterprise.

The necessary components of a virtue theory are missing from Nietzsche's work, and their absence is no oversight. Nietzsche's "immoralism," his stated opposition to morality *as such*, all morality (*GM* P:6), cannot be reconciled with the attribution to him of a normatively successful moral theory. Since he approaches morality from a position outside theory altogether, since he finds joy in "that free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws and the traditional evaluations of things" (*HH* 34), his position is far more aptly characterized as "anti-theory."[65] Nietzsche's novel critical project, to promote suspicion, on a grand scale, about the kinds of prior commitments and presuppositions without which there could be no morality at all, leaves the important questions unresolved and very much open-ended. He surely does not close off the possibility that something may one day answer to the name of 'morality' and nevertheless escape the hammer blow of his criticism. But to be open to a possibility and to develop it oneself (or to recommend or demand that we develop it) are two very different things. Scholars unsatisfied with the open-ended reading seem to neglect this, however, and leap to realize that possibility on Nietzsche's behalf.

There have been a number of valiant efforts to make Nietzsche, quite against his will, a staid and respectable member of a continuous moral philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Anscombe. But the insistence on ascribing to Nietzsche an affirmative ethical theory, I think, does him and his texts an injustice and impedes our understanding of his thought and what makes it genuinely distinctive. It represents not only an unwillingness to confront the textual evidence for Nietzsche's "immoralism," but also to appreciate the peculiar challenge that it is meant to issue. On a robust understanding of what Nietzsche asks us to imagine—namely, the possibility that one could live without value commitments of the sort "morality" has required and could nevertheless not be a nihilist—he is precisely what he says he is: not *an* immoralist, but *the first* immoralist. Not a critic; but *the destroyer par excellence*, who is, in so being, also "a *bearer of glad tidings* as no one ever was before" (*EH* "Destiny" 1).

[65] In the sense intended by Duncan Richter, who characterizes the views of Iris Murdoch, Cora Diamond and Charles Taylor in this way. See "Virtue Without Theory," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 33 (1999): 353–69, p. 353; cf. Hacker-Wright, "Virtue Ethics Without Right Action."