



Nietzsche, Virtue, and Education: Cultivating the *Sovereign Individual* Through a New Type of Education

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Abstract

From a *prima facie* point of view, Nietzsche's use of virtue may appear to be a form of virtue ethics. Certainly, this is one position that has been established within the secondary literature; however, I argue that a more fruitful philosophical reading is to view his use of virtue as a part of his *drive* psychology. Indeed, what makes Nietzsche's philosophical psychology relevant to this topic, is the way in which he characterises the "*sovereign individual*" as an agent that is in control of good or appropriate actions because they are strong enough in character to sublimate their "drives" in the act of willing. Nietzsche's philosophical psychology has important educational implications because an obvious place to cultivate the *sovereign individual* is through education, but to Nietzsche, education and educational institutions seem only interested in promoting certain Christian virtues (e.g., faith, hope, and charity), and herd forming virtues (e.g., obedience, guilt, and equality) that breed sick young people who are decadent and weak willed. In response to this dilemma, I turn my attention to how Nietzsche overcomes this problem by proposing *new* virtues that should figure in a new type of education which is concerned with educating the *will* of the *sovereign individual*. Central to Nietzsche's new type of education is the painful labour of self-cultivation (*Bildung*), the revaluation of one's values, and a ceaseless striving to overcome obstacles (will to power), so we are *able* to educate ourselves *against* life-negating virtues or vices that make us decadent and weak willed.

Keywords Nietzsche · Virtue(s) · Drive(s) · Character · Sovereign individual · Self-cultivation (*Bildung*) · Will to power · Education

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Introduction

From a *prima facie* point of view, Nietzsche's use of virtue may appear to be a form of virtue ethics. Certainly, this is one position that has been established within the secondary literature. For instance, in the secondary literature, it has become *de rigueur* for philosophers and scholars to emphasise the similarity of Nietzsche's human ideal of the *Übermensch* to Aristotle's *megalopsychia* from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book IV, 1123b–1125b), and claim that Nietzsche's understanding of virtue is an affirmative form of virtue ethics that has its origins in ancient Greek values and ethics.¹ The most influential of these is probably Kaufmann's (1950/1974) account found in his seminal work, *Nietzsche*. For an opposite point of view, Magnus (1980, p. 263) in the article titled, "Aristotle and Nietzsche: 'Megalopsychia' and 'Uebermensch'", disagrees with Kaufmann's claims, and argues that the comparison with Aristotle is superficial, and that Nietzsche's attempted "transvaluation of values is dominated by his understanding (or misunderstanding) of Plato and Socrates: not Aristotle".

Even though the matter remains an open question, and the debate continues in various forms,² it is quite clear that Nietzsche regards virtue to be an important concept. Often Nietzsche uses the concept in a manner that is similar to how it has traditionally been used, albeit, with some important differences to the classical view that has been mostly shaped by Socrates and Plato.³ Beyond the philosophical scholarship on Nietzsche, the level of interest in a neo-Aristotelian approach to virtue ethics in education and educational research has grown considerably over the last 20–30 years.⁴ It could be argued that MacIntyre's

¹ For a modest sample of secondary literature that either directly or indirectly explores Nietzsche's use of the concept virtue, see the following: *Nietzsche* (Kaufmann 1950/1974), "Aristotle and Nietzsche: 'Megalopsychia' and 'Uebermensch'" (Magnus 1980), "A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics" (Solomon 1985), *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (Hunt 1991), "Outline of a Nietzschean Virtue Ethics" (Swanton 1998), "Nietzsche and Virtue Ethics" (Slotte 1998), "Nietzsche's Virtues: A Personal Inquiry" (Solomon 2001), *Living with Nietzsche* (Solomon 2003), "Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality: An Ethics of Virtue" (Brobjer 2003), "Our Virtues" (Guay 2005), "Nietzsche: Virtue Ethics ... Virtue Politics" (Daigle 2006), "Nietzschean Virtues Ethics" (Swanton 2006), "Nietzsche and the Virtues of Mature Egoism" (Swanton 2011), "The Most Agreeable of All Vices: Nietzsche as Virtue Epistemologist" (Alfano 2013), "Nietzsche and Virtue" (Harris 2015), "The Nietzschean Virtue of Authenticity: 'Wie man wird, was man ist.'" (Daigle 2015), "Is Nietzsche a Virtue Theorist?" (Berry 2015), and *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche* (Swanton 2015).

² See the relatively recent special issue, titled "Nietzsche and Virtue", which is found in volume 49, issue 3 that is taken from *The Journal of Value Inquiry*.

³ Take for instance Plato's four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage (or fortitude), self-discipline (or temperance), and justice taken from the *Republic*. Nietzsche may have had this precedent in mind when he gives his own version in *Daybreak* (§556) of the "good four": "*Honest* towards ourselves and whoever *else* is a friend to us; *brave* towards the enemy; *magnanimous* towards the defeated; *polite* – always: this is what the four cardinal virtues want us to be." Often, when Nietzsche is referring to ancient virtues he associates it with Socrates and Plato. In the latter case, he is consistently critical of Socrates and Plato for making virtue too abstract and rational. In response, Nietzsche wants to increase the complexity of the concept virtue by not only making a distinction between good and bad virtues (e.g., virtues of the strong and weak), but also point out that even a good (or strong) version of virtue, say, for example, courage, is not as simple as we may think it is because there are various ways to be courageous, each with their own value. What Nietzsche has in mind here is a belief that virtue is a consequence of our character. Due to space restrictions I am limited by what I can say here in this footnote, but I do extend on this and other points in this essay.

⁴ For some contemporary examples, see the following: *Aristotelian Character Education* (Kristjánsson 2015), *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education* (Kristjánsson 2016), *The Theory and Practice of Virtue Education* (Harrison & Walker 2018), and *Virtues and Virtue Education in Theory and Practice* (Darnell & Kristjánsson 2022).

(1981/2007) *After Virtue*, was a catalyst for the interest in Aristotle, virtue ethics, character education, and virtue education. Recently, in *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Education*, Jonas & Yacek (2019) have argued that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist.

In terms of Nietzsche and his treatment of the concept virtue, what becomes evident from his usage is the way in which he seems to fluctuate between negative or positive value depending on whether he approves or disproves of how it is being used. For instance, in *Twilight of the Idols*, negative value is often assigned to virtue when it is being used in a Christian, metaphysical or altruistic sense (see the section titled, “The Problem of Socrates”); whereas, positive value is attributed to those who have tamed the “beast of man” and become “strong” (see the sections titled, “The ‘Improvers’ of Mankind”, “What the Germans Lack”, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man”, and “What I Owe to the Ancients”). Rather than follow the ancient formulation of virtue as the “health of the soul”, Nietzsche argues that it is more realistic to change this to appreciate that “*your* virtue is the health of *your* soul” (*GS*, §120).⁵ In addition, Nietzsche makes it quite clear that reason and knowledge cannot adequately explain the virtues, nor do they lead to virtue (*WP*, §317, §450). So when he criticises Socrates’s and Plato’s formula of virtue, that “reason = virtue = happiness” (*TI*, “The Problem of Socrates”, §4, §10), Nietzsche is basically saying that virtue is a consequence of our character (i.e., our drives). According to Nietzsche, since the self consists of an infinite number of competing drives that are in a constant state of flux, one of the best ways to determine whether an agent is strong or weak, is to analyse how they rank-order or sublimate their “innermost drives” in action because our drives reflect who we are (*HAA*, I, preface, §6; *D*, §119; *BGE*, §6, §9, §12, §19). Just as there are an infinite number of competing drives, so too are there an infinite number of virtues and vices; however, Nietzsche’s interest in virtue stems from a belief that how we act is a consequence of our character (i.e., our drives). Central to Nietzsche’s position on virtue is the view that each one of us should devise “*his own* virtue” that is “organic” in the sense of being both subjective and existential (*A*, §11). From this follows a promising line of enquiry on Nietzsche’s understanding of the concept virtue, namely the belief we can cultivate or inhibit the strength of our character. Contra to the established secondary literature that claims Nietzsche’s use of virtue is a form of virtue ethics, I remain unconvinced by this position due to a more fruitful and novel philosophical reading that views Nietzsche’s usage of the concept as part of his *drive* psychology because it connects with the unified self as a *sovereign individual*.

Indeed, what makes Nietzsche’s philosophical psychology relevant to this topic, is the way in which he characterises the “*sovereign individual*” as an agent that is in control of good or appropriate actions because they are strong enough in character to sublimate their “drives” in the act of willing. Without a doubt, Nietzsche’s philosophical psychology has important educational implications because an obvious place to cultivate the *sovereign individual* is through education. However, to Nietzsche, education and educational institutions seem only interested in promoting certain Christian virtues (e.g., faith, hope, charity, and so on), and herd forming virtues (e.g., obedience, guilt, equality, and so on) that

⁵ From here on in, I will follow the academic convention of citing Nietzsche’s work using the initials of the English titles in the translations referred to in the reference section of this essay along with Arabic numerals to identify the volume, relevant part, and numbered section or part, in this order (not page numbers). For details relating to the abbreviations and translations used, see the abbreviation and reference section. When required, I have referred to the original German translation of Nietzsche’s *Werke* from the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGA), the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) or the *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe* (eKGWB) that have been edited by Colli and Montinari.

breed sick young people who are decadent and weak willed (e.g., *A*, §20–§24 & §42–§58). Subsequently, for the purposes of this essay, I will be concerned with the discussion of two issues: first, I provide a brief account of Nietzsche’s drive psychology. Here, I consider the development of Nietzsche’s thinking that is concerned with character, and how the drives of our character determine virtue, *not* virtue that determines character. Central to Nietzsche’s account of genuine agency, is the concept of the unified self that is exemplified by the *sovereign individual* in action; and, lastly, in response to Nietzsche’s scathing critique of education and educational institutions, I turn my attention to how he overcomes this problem by proposing *new* virtues that should figure in a new type of education that is concerned with educating the *will* of the *sovereign individual*. A central feature of Nietzsche’s new type of education is the painful labour of self-cultivation (*Bildung*), the reevaluation of one’s values, and a ceaseless striving to overcome obstacles (will to power), so we are *able* to educate ourselves *against* life-negating virtues or vices that make us decadent and weak willed.⁶

Nietzsche’s Drive Psychology: The Drives of our Character Determine Virtue, *not* Virtue that Determines Character

Nietzsche clearly considers virtue to be an important concept, but it is important to point out that he views the nature of virtue quite differently from the classical view. Often, when referring to virtue, Nietzsche is usually speaking either in generalities or he associates it with Socrates and Plato.⁷ In the latter case, Nietzsche is critical of Socrates and Plato’s view of virtue because they equate both happiness and reason or knowledge with virtue, which he schematically represents through the formula, “reason=virtue=happiness” (*TI*, “The Problem of Socrates”, §4, §10). To Nietzsche, the classical view of virtue that is grounded in reason or knowledge cannot adequately explain virtue, nor does it lead to virtue because it ignores or rejects our drives (instincts) and the unconscious, which for Nietzsche constitutes the essence of being human, and hence should feature in any account of ethics. To Nietzsche, virtues are akin to drives, and hence more unconscious, than conscious. In typical Nietzsche fashion, he is too iconoclastic a thinker to accept virtues according to convention or tradition, and so we should not be surprised when he describes virtue as “refined *passions*”, “drives”, “instincts”, “affects” and their “sublimations”, and the “will to power”, (*WP*, §255, §317, §327, §384, §387, §428). Interestingly, Nietzsche

⁶ This paper builds on previous work I have done on Nietzsche. See for example, the following: “Nietzsche on aesthetics, educators and education” (Stolz, 2017), “A genealogical analysis of the concept of ‘good’ teaching: A polemic” (Stolz, 2018), “Nietzsche’s psychology of the self: the art of overcoming the divided self” (Stolz, 2020), “Nietzsche, eternal recurrence, and education: the role of the great cultivating thought in the art of self-cultivation (*Bildung*)” (Stolz, 2021), “Nietzsche: truth, perspectivism, and his concern with *Bildung*” (Stolz, 2022a), and “Nietzsche on aesthetic education: a fictional narrative” (Stolz, 2022b).

⁷ Nietzsche’s reference to specific virtues may seem to be varied and ad hoc, but this variety could be attributed to the drives that he approved of. In saying this, his use of the Platonic virtues (i.e. wisdom, courage, moderation and justice) seem to be consistently and positively represented in some form or another throughout his work. For instance, in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (*UM*, II, §8), he affirms justice, magnanimity, bravery, and wisdom. Likewise, in *Daybreak* (D, §556) he refers to “*the good four*” as honesty, bravery, magnanimity, and politeness. I could provide further examples of particular virtues that Nietzsche refers in his extensive corpus, but my point here is to elucidate how Nietzsche promotes certain drives of character which he regards as *new* virtues, such as “honesty”, “self-control”, “self-determination” or “self-government”, and so on. I will expand on the latter, in the next section.

portrays virtue as the means by which a “particular species of man preserves and enhances himself” (*WP*, §175) as qualities valuable to the community. For instance, certain drives are considered to be valuable if they both accord with the “herd instinct” for “self-preservation” and they are emulated by others (*WP*, §315). Likewise, Nietzsche argues that we should change the classical account of virtue as “virtue is the health of the soul”, to something less abstract that takes into consideration “innumerable healths of the body” because what is “... healthy for your *body* depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors ...”, provides a valuable insight into who you are as a person (*GS*, §120). He goes on to highlight how people who are “healthy” normally possess a “peculiar virtue” of being strong characters with strong drives (*ibid*). What makes these strong characters notably “healthy” to Nietzsche is the way in which they demonstrate mastery or self-mastery over competing drives, in ways that are considered to be valuable to the agent and/or to others more generally in the community. Rather than adopt the classical position of virtue that views virtue as those qualities that make an agent “good”, Nietzsche believes the drives of our character determine virtue, *not* virtue that determines character. This is why he thinks it is easier and more reliable to understand character—particularly strong character—because what is considered to be valuable drives of the strong character tend to become commonly known as virtue. Although Nietzsche does not specifically provide an account of what it is that makes a “drive” a virtue, the drive concept is a key concept that provides a more fruitful philosophical reading of Nietzsche’s use of the concept virtue, particularly when it is viewed as part of his drive psychology. Subsequently, if we are to understand Nietzsche’s drive psychology, an account of his concept of drive is crucial.

So what is Nietzsche’s drive psychology? Talk of “drives” certainly has an interesting historical trajectory, and is usually associated with the scientific study of certain motivational states or causal forces that govern organic development and being which initiates action, such as a need to satisfy urges of hunger or thirst.⁸ In this case, Nietzsche explicitly contrasts his drive psychology with the “clumsy naturalists” that only provide “materialistic” and “atomistic” explanations of human behaviour, and in the process fail miserably to understand that the self is a relation of drives (*BGE*, §6, §9, §12). In a sense, this is why Nietzsche complains that the “drive to self-preservation” is often misunderstood as the “cardinal drive in an organic being”, when in fact it is to “*vent* its strength” as a “will to power” (*BGE* §13). Here, Nietzsche is not trying to elucidate a conception of “willing”, rather, he is attempting to reveal that our essential nature consists of drives. According to Katsafanas’s (2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2016) account of Nietzsche’s philosophical psychology, drives manifest themselves by structuring an agent’s perspectives that generate affective orientations in agents which are uniquely different to scientific explanations of behaviour relating to motivational states or causal forces that govern organic beings. Katsafanas goes on to argue that the nature of Nietzschean drives have the following characteristic features: (1) Drives are dispositions that induce affective orientations that can be understood as an evaluative orientation; (2) Drives have both an aim and an object, where the aim is a relatively constant pattern of activity sought by the drive,

⁸ For work that provides a useful background of the drive concept and the blurring of the animal/human divide, see the following: “The Emergence of the Drive Concept and the Collapse of the Animal/Human Divide” (Katsafanas 2018).

whereas the object is a chance occasion of expression; and, (3) Drives constantly aim at encountering and overcoming resistance as a will to power.⁹

First, drives are always embodied in agents as dispositions, so when Nietzsche claims that drives adopt perspectives, he is referring to the way in which a drive, operating through an agent, can affect the agent's perspectives and thoughts by "colouring" the content of the world in selective ways (*GS*, §7, §139, §152, §301; *BGE* §6). In order to make sense of what Nietzsche means when he argues that drives induce affective orientations in agent's that are selective, take for instance an example of hatred. In this case, if an agent determines that they hate someone, it normally manifests itself by inducing a certain orientation toward the object of hatred, which in turn leads the agent to find certain *salient* features as loathsome, and other redeeming features as peripheral. This affectively charged orientation is understood and experienced in evaluative terms as negative due to the conflict generated within the agent.¹⁰ This brings about other features of Nietzsche's drive psychology and his emphasise on drives continuously seeking expression through their "... ebb and flood, their play and counterplay among one another ..." because drives actively aim at the "exercise" or "discharge" of its "strength" (*D*, §119).

Second, drives aim at their own expression, and take various objects as chance occasions for expression. For example, the aggressive drive aims to exercise or discharge aggressive activity, and so needs to find someone or something to vent its aggression toward. So drives actively aim at expression, in the sense that they are not satisfied by the attainment of any one determinate object, and as a result, after expressing itself on one object, the drive will seek another as these objects are merely chance occasions for expression. While the aim of the drive may be *constant*, the objects may vary continuously. Since the drive motivates the agent to seek out a certain form of activity (i.e., aggression) as means of satisfying its aim through the expression of temporary objects (e.g., aggressive activity in sport), it is important to note that drives *perpetually* aim to seek out new obstacles, resistances, or challenges to overcome. The latter connects with the last characteristic feature of drives.

Lastly, drives constantly aim at encountering and overcoming resistance as a will to power. Resistances generally take two forms. There are *external resistances* that arise from the fact that despite our best efforts, the world is unpredictable, and hence uncontrollable. Likewise, there are *internal resistances* that arise from competition amongst our drives. Since there are multiple drives competing for expression means that in order for a drive to express itself, requires a unified agent who is strong enough in character to self-control or

⁹ In this section, I draw heavily from Katsafanas's work on Nietzsche's philosophical psychology because I think he satisfactorily addresses many of the differing philosophical interpretations that exist in the secondary literature relating to Nietzschean drives that are problematic, but more importantly, he offers a new account of Nietzschean drives that I agree with. Unfortunately, a lack of space does not permit me to go into any detail relating to the ongoing debate surrounding Nietzschean drives, plus it would distract from my central task at the moment. This being an account of Nietzsche's drive psychology. For Katsafanas's excellent work on Nietzsche's philosophical psychology, see the following: "The concept of unified agency in Nietzsche, Plato, and Schiller" (Katsafanas 2011a), "Deriving ethics from action: A Nietzschean version of Constitutivism" (Katsafanas 2011b), "Nietzsche on Agency and Self-Ignorance" (Katsafanas 2012), "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology" (Katsafanas 2013a), *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism* (Katsafanas 2013b), "Value, Affect, Drive" (Katsafanas 2015), and *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Katsafanas 2016).

¹⁰ It is important to note that agents are typically ignorant of their own evaluative orientation, but as Nietzsche makes clear in his extensive corpus, agents *can* become more aware of their perspectives, affects, and reflective thought through the painful labour of self-analysis, and the difficult task of self-cultivation (*Bildung*). Later in my essay, I will expand on the latter.

self-overcome competing drives. Here, we start to see features of Nietzsche's characterisation of the *sovereign individual* that will be central to my thesis in the next section; however, before I do so, I have one final point about the link between Nietzsche's drive psychology and the will to power. The link being the way in which the will to power describes the structure of drives. Since *all* human actions are drive-motivated, then it follows that *all* actions inescapably aim at power (i.e., overcoming resistance).¹¹ Not only does Nietzsche tell us that progress toward a goal (*progressus*) is a fundamental feature of life which is manifest as a "will to power" (*GM*, II, §12), but he argues that if an agent cannot *unify* the self to "... become master over yourself, master also over your virtues ..." (*HAH*, I, Preface, §6), then the agent cannot be considered to be "strong" in character because they lack self-mastery or the ability to "master" their drives in the act of willing. Consequently, one of the central roles Nietzsche sets for education relates to education of character and what he calls the "*sovereign individual*".

Nietzsche and a New Type of Education: Cultivating the *Sovereign Individual* Through a New Type of Education

Central to Nietzsche's explanation of the "*sovereign individual*" is an account of agency that draws a distinction between *genuine action* and *mere behaviour*. In the present case, Nietzsche marks the distinction with the concept of *unity* that equates genuine actions which spring from a unified agent.¹² Take for instance the example from the *Genealogy of Morality* where Nietzsche praises the "*sovereign individual*" as someone who is an "autonomous" individual who is distinguished by the fact that they possess their "own independent long will", and hence "strong and reliable" because they are the "possessor of a long, unbreakable will" (*GM*, II, §2). In contrast, non-sovereign individuals are simply determined by whatever "instinct" or drive happens to arise or dominant the agent. Nietzsche goes on to argue that the sovereign individual is "... strong enough to uphold ... [their commitments] ... even against accidents, even 'against fate' ...", while, the non-sovereign individual is "... lesser-willed and more unreliable ..." and who "... breaks his word already the moment it leaves his mouth ..." (*GM*, II, §2). So a picture of the sovereign individual emerges, and finds expression in the non-sovereign individual who is incapable of holding themselves to a course of action when confronted with "accidents" and dominant "instincts" or drives. Compounding the situation further, since the non-sovereign individual cannot "master himself" and demonstrate "power over oneself" means they will

¹¹ In sum, all human action manifests as a will to power, and this is why power is a constitutive aim of action. For an excellent discussion on Nietzschean constitutivism, see Katsafanas's (2013b) work titled, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism*. On a separate, but relevant point, this model of agency may appear to give rise to certain philosophical problems, particularly in relation to what Nietzsche has to say on the matter. Unfortunately, due to space restrictions, I am limited by what I can say on this topic here. For some relevant literature on this topic, see: *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Katsafanas 2016).

¹² Nietzsche's concept of *unity* as it relates to the unified self has recently emerged as an area of discussion in the secondary literature. At the moment, there does seem to be a general consensus, that: (1) Nietzsche's concept of unity is meant to be an analysis of freedom; (2) Unity refers to a relation between the agent's drives; and, (3) Unity is achieved when one drive exerts control and order on the other drives. For some recent, and relevant literature on this topic, see: *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy* (Gemes & May 2009), and *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Katsafanas 2016).

only be able to fulfil their projects and goals, if they are fortunate or lucky enough not to be tempted by their dominant instincts or drives. Here, Nietzsche draws a distinction between acts *actively* produced by a unified agent (i.e., genuine action), and acts *passively* produced by a disunified agent because they are a mere vessel of forces (i.e., mere behaviour). This is why Nietzsche characterises the “*sovereign individual*” as a *unified* agent who is in control of good or appropriate actions because they are strong enough in character to sublimate their drives in the act of willing.¹³

It is worth noting that the sovereign individual is reinforced elsewhere in Nietzsche’s work, particularly when he makes reference to “strong” and “weak” characters (*GS*, §290, §295, §296). In the former case, strong characters command or dominate their “natures” in such a way they come to enjoy the benefits of a “tremendous will” that has been cultivated as a “law of their own” (*GS*, §290). In the latter case, he goes on to argue that weak characters are without “power over themselves” and so become “slaves” to their own “nature”. Undoubtedly, this is an important passage from Nietzsche’s work as it connects strong characters with self-mastery or self-determination with the sovereign individual, and weakness with a lack of these attributes. So it becomes clear that Nietzsche thinks some individuals are strong in character as a result of being unified, and vice versa, some individuals are weak in character because they are disunified. In terms of the latter, Nietzsche argues that although it is rare, it is possible for weak individuals to become unified and strong in character, but in order to bring this about, “*one thing is needed*” and this is to “... ‘give style’ to one’s character ...” through “... long practice and daily work at it ...” (*GS*, §290). To “give style” to one’s character refers to “breeding” self-mastery or self-determination that has been cultivated through the “habit” forming practice of being “*firm*” or “*hard*” with oneself and “re-learning” how to become master over oneself (*GS*, §295, §296). To Nietzsche, one obvious place to cultivate the *sovereign individual* is through education and educational institutions; however, he is quite hesitant about this idea because he thinks modern education and educational institutions breed sick young people who are decadent and weak willed because they promote both Christian virtues (e.g., faith, hope, charity, and so on), and herd forming virtues (e.g., obedience, guilt, equality, and so on) (e.g., *A*, §20–§24 & §42–§58). To overcome this problem, Nietzsche uses his “revaluation of all values” project, and proposes *new* virtues from *old* virtues. Some may be identifiable by old names, while others are very difficult to label, and this is why Nietzsche creates and develops his own terminology, which is especially prominent in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For example, bestowing the virtue of “self-overcoming” (*Z*, I, “Of the Bestowing Virtue”, *Z*, II, “Of Self-Overcoming”). What does become clear from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and other works from his extensive corpus, is that Nietzsche wants to retain for his own purposes the use of virtue because it is a motivating force that links with the drives from which strong characters come from. Moreover, Nietzsche considers *sophrosyne* to be an important *new* virtue due to the crucial role it plays in the cultivation of the *sovereign individual*.¹⁴ The importance of *sophrosyne* for

¹³ Katsafanas’s (2016) account of Nietzschean unity provides plenty of useful philosophical insights into the *sovereign individual*. Even though Katsafanas is mainly concerned with defending his account of Nietzschean unity as an adequate account of genuine agency, the following schema of Nietzschean unity is still useful to this section. This schema being: The agent A’s, and affirms his A-ing. Further knowledge of the drives and affects that figures in A’s etiology would not undermine this affirmation of A-ing.

¹⁴ Nietzsche refers to *sophrosyne* frequently throughout his extensive corpus; however, appears under different names, such as “prudence” (Besonnenheit), “measure” (Mass), “moderation” (Mässigkeit), “self-control” or “self-mastery” (Selbstbeherrschung), “self-discipline” (Selbstüberwindung), and “self-determination” (Selbstbestimmung). For a small sample of relevant examples, see: *BT*, §4, §15; *HAH*, I, §114, §464,

Nietzsche is most obvious in the negative sense when he refers to decadents and weak characters who need to “self-overcome” their lack of *sophrosyne*; whereas, in the positive sense, strong characters are affirmed for their self-mastery or self-determination. Since the *sovereign individual* is strong in character as a result of bringing order to the competing drives in the act of willing, to Nietzsche it makes sense that the term “virtue” is used to describe a *unified agent*, and such a virtue is *sophrosyne*.¹⁵

How should the new virtue of *sophrosyne* figure in education? To Nietzsche, in order to cultivate and produce a *sovereign individual* requires a new type of education. This new type of education is concerned with educating the *will* of the *sovereign individual*, rather than the intellect. This is made clear, when he states:

Our absurd education system (which envisages the “useful civil servant” as a guiding model) thinks it can get by with “instruction”, with brain-drill; it has no idea that something else is needed first—education of *will power*, tests are laid down for everything, but not for the main thing: whether one can *will*, whether one may *promise*; the young man finishes without a single question, without any curiosity about this supreme value-problem of his nature ... (KSA, 12, 10[165])

Later, in the same passage, Nietzsche goes on to talk about the importance of “self-reflection” and “self-discovery” as a way of “stepping out” of the “tyranny of pernicious little habits and rules” that govern individuals as a way to gain an insight into the disunified nature of human beings. Even though Nietzsche argues that the majority of modern individuals are typically disunified “herd animals” that are guided by “herd instincts”, he does think that it is possible to become a unified agent. For most moderns, this is a significant challenge because it requires an individual that is strong enough in character to sublimate their drives in the act of willing; however, in order become strong in character requires the difficult task of self-cultivation or self-mastery that is intimately connected with the painful labour of self-analysis and “self-overcoming” their lack of *sophrosyne*. Here, *sophrosyne* shares striking similarities with Nietzsche’s concern with *Bildung*, to the point that I would argue they are terminological variants.¹⁶ Due to Nietzsche’s explicit concern with *Bildung*,

Footnote 14 (continued)

HAH, II, §230, HAH, III, §305; D, §109, §156; GS, §290, §305, §347, §375; Z, II, “Of Self-Overcoming”, Z, III, “Of the Virtue that Makes Small”, Z, III, “Of Old and New Law-Tables”; BGE, §224.

¹⁵ Nietzsche does refer to other *new* virtues that are uniquely Nietzschean virtues. Solomon (2001, 2003) provides three different sets of so-called Nietzschean virtues (i.e. “Nietzsche’s Aristotelian Virtues”, “Distinctively Nietzschean Virtues”, and “Nietzsche’s Crypto-Virtues”). From these, the latter two sets of virtues are of interest because they are uniquely Nietzschean virtues, particularly the “crypto-virtues” as they are more closely aligned with the new virtue of *sophrosyne* that is of interest to this essay. For the “Distinctively Nietzschean Virtues” set, these are as follows: exuberance, style, depth, risk-taking, fatalism (*amor fati*), aestheticism, playfulness, and solitude. Likewise, for the “Nietzsche’s Crypto-Virtues” set, these are follows: health, strength, hardness, egoism, and responsibility.

¹⁶ The German word “*Bildung*” has multiple meanings – such as “education”, “culture”, “formation”, “fashioning”, “shaping”, “setting up” – none of which captures its significance, and so translation into the English word of “education” would be an injustice to the conceptual richness of *Bildung* because it is not just education, but involves much more, such as self-cultivation, self-development, self-formation, self-control, self-mastery, self-discipline, self-determination, self-government, and so on. For some interesting works that discuss Nietzsche’s tradition of *Bildung*, see the following: *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: ‘Bildung’ from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Bruford, 1975), *Nietzsche’s Therapy* (Ure, 2008), “Nietzsche’s Ethics of Self-Cultivation and Eternity” (Ure, 2018), *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Herdt, 2019), and “Nietzsche: truth, perspectivism, and his concern with *Bildung*” (Stolz, 2022a).

it makes sense to use the term *Bildung* from here on in because it brings together the central tenets of his thinking pertaining to the cultivation of strong characters that has significant ramifications for a new type of education. For instance, this new type of education has the potential to reveal “what one is” now (i.e., disunified agent or herd animal), and who they could become (i.e., unified agent or sovereign individual). If the goal is to become a sovereign individual, then Nietzsche’s “revaluation of all values” project has a significant role to play in the new type of education that he envisages as it requires a reevaluation of the drives, so that the *old* table of values (i.e., virtues and vices) used to label aspects of an individual’s character can be transvalued into a *new* table of values (i.e., self-mastery, self-discipline, self-determination) that liberates the individual from morality, custom, and so on. Since Nietzsche knew this was no easy undertaking, he frequently associates *Bildung* with a kind of sublimation of the drives as a distinctive feature of the sovereign individual. For instance, the sovereign individual can regulate their drives successfully without reliance on external factors, such as the threat of punishment; whereas, the non-sovereign individual needs some form of external sanctions in order to act appropriately. More importantly, the sovereign individual frees themselves from dependence on others and in the process the strong will to self-determination is made manifest as a will to power measured according to the degree of power expressed by an individual’s character (*GM*, II, §18; *TI*, “Expeditions of Untimely Man”, §38). Within the context of Nietzsche’s new type of education, educating the *will* of the sovereign individual means the cultivation of “strong” wills or characters through heightened expressions of will to power and self-overcoming. In a sense, the product of this new type of education is a sovereign individual who embodies self-mastery, self-discipline, self-determination, and so on, in their life. Since Nietzsche was serious about addressing what he considered to be life-negating virtues or vices that make us decadent and weak willed, the latter table of values are affirmed for counteracting its effects. Indeed, this seems to be the reason why Nietzsche emphasises the importance of self-mastery, self-discipline, self-determination, and so on, as it enables the individual to counteract the harmful effects of certain drives, a decadent culture, and nihilistic values found in society, so they can become *free*. In terms of the latter point, to Nietzsche the sovereign individual is *free* in the sense that they are not dependent on external influences because they are able to regulate internal influences in the act of willing.¹⁷ This is a radically different type of education as it is concerned with educating the *will*, and this is inevitably an arduous and painful undertaking as it involves inner conflict, which Nietzsche calls “self-overcoming”, and hence why this new type of education is not something that Nietzsche says is encouraged in modern education and educational institutions as it emphasises a more individualistic idea of *self-education*.¹⁸

The educational implications of Nietzsche’s new type of education often leads to the following question: To what extent would Nietzsche’s account of the sovereign individual—conceived from an educational point of view—be available to everyone as a broad educational project or would it only be conceived as a narrow educational project for the

¹⁷ Although not exhaustive, for some interesting works that discuss Nietzsche’s views on free will, freedom, autonomy, and so on, see the following: *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy* (Gemes & May 2009), *Nietzsche on Morality* (Leiter 2015), and *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Katsafanas 2016).

¹⁸ For an excellent piece of work that discusses Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas as it relates to education, such as the notion of “self-education”, “sublimation”, and so on, see the following: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Reconciling Knowledge and Life* (Small 2016).

select few? In some of the secondary literature, there seems a preoccupation with answering this type of question (e.g., Jonas & Yacek 2019).¹⁹ The response is to either charge Nietzsche with a form “elitism” because he seems to be preoccupied with the latter (i.e., select few) or to offer-up an apology that benefits the former (i.e., everyone). Unfortunately, I think these concerns are grounded in a misreading of Nietzsche’s corpus because it excludes the possibility that anyone can become a sovereign individual. This is not to deny that Nietzsche was consistently disparaging of mass schooling (e.g., *FE*). Compounding the issue further, Nietzsche’s views on education, when viewed from a modern point of view renders them “elitist”; however, the point I want to make is that it is a special form of elitism that is grounded in character, not ability or wealth. Likewise, it is worth reinforcing the point that Nietzsche’s new type of education is concerned with educating the *will* of the *sovereign individual*, rather than the intellect. To moderns, this is a foreign concept, and yet it is a much more complex and multi-dimensional than what is commonly associated with elitism today. If anything, much more needs to be said about the current conditions of contemporary society, modern education and educational institutions making such a proposition an impossibility. In relation to the latter, Nietzsche in his lectures titled, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, provides a useful starting place because it represents some of Nietzsche’s earliest thoughts on the concept of *Bildung*, why he was concerned with the concept, and how he thinks it can be cultivated.²⁰

Undoubtedly, Nietzsche’s drive psychology was ahead of its time as it is quite useful for understanding some of the ills found in people from contemporary society today.²¹ The idea that education and educational institutions only seem to be interested in promoting certain Christian virtues (e.g., faith, hope, charity, and so on), and herd forming virtues (e.g., obedience, guilt, equality, and so on) that breed sick young people who are decadent and weak willed may be controversial to some (e.g., A, §20–§24 & §42–§58). In a sense, it is irrelevant whether Nietzsche’s claims about education and educational institutions are right or wrong because the cultivation of the sovereign individual is a universal aim of any educational enterprise worthy to be called an education. In this case, a great deal of self-mastery, self-discipline, self-determination, and so on, is needed if we are to liberate the *new* self in the cultivation of the sovereign individual. To Nietzsche, one way to cultivate a strong will or character is through heightened expressions of will to power, and in the process of overcoming resistance we come to understand “what one is” now (*being*), and who they could become (*becoming*). This is why a central feature of Nietzsche’s new type of education is the painful labour of self-cultivation (*Bildung*), the revaluation of one’s values,

¹⁹ There is other secondary literature that addresses this question; however, for the purposes of this essay I have intentionally selected *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Education: Rethinking Ethics, Equality and the Good Life in a Democratic Age* (Jonas & Yacek 2019) because it is a relatively recent publication that attempts to address this question from a philosophical and educational point of view. Jonas & Yacek (2019) explore the “elitist” reading and essentially offer a sophisticated apology.

²⁰ For more on this topic, see the following: “Nietzsche, eternal recurrence, and education: the role of the great cultivating thought in the art of self-cultivation (*Bildung*)” (Stolz, 2021), and “Nietzsche: truth, perspectivism, and his concern with *Bildung*” (Stolz, 2022a).

²¹ It is important to note the contribution Nietzsche’s psychology has had on psychology, particularly analytical psychology. Work by Parkes (1994) titled, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology* has demonstrated the significant contribution Nietzsche makes to analytical psychology. It is worth noting that even though Freud denied having read Nietzsche’s work, there is persuasive evidence that he was both directly and indirectly familiar with his general corpus. Interestingly, Freud (1914/1917) does acknowledge and concede that Nietzsche “anticipated” his central themes, and in many instances psychoanalysis confirms his psychology. See: *The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*.

and a ceaseless striving to overcome obstacles (will to power), so we are *able* to educate ourselves *against* life-negating virtues or vices that make us decadent and weak willed.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that a more fruitful philosophical reading is to view Nietzsche's use of virtue as a part of his *drive* psychology. In the secondary literature, it has become *de rigueur* for philosophers and scholars to view Nietzsche as a kind of virtue ethicist, particularly in education and educational research. Even though the matter remains an open question, and the debate continues on in various forms, in most cases, his treatment of the term seems to fluctuate between negative or positive value depending on whether he approves or disproves of how it is being used. For instance, in *Twilight of the Idols*, negative value is often assigned to virtue when it is being used in a Christian, metaphysical or altruistic sense; whereas, positive value is attributed to those who have tamed the "beast of man" and become "strong". To Nietzsche, the classical view of virtue that is grounded in reason or knowledge cannot adequately explain virtue, nor does it lead to virtue because it ignores or rejects our drives, which for Nietzsche constitutes the essence of being human. According to Nietzsche, since the self consists of an infinite number of competing drives that are in a constant state of flux, one of the best ways to determine whether an agent is strong or weak, is to analyse how they rank-order or sublimate their drives in action because our drives reflect who we are. So Nietzsche's interest in virtue stems from a belief that how we act is a consequence of our character (i.e., drives). I argued that what makes Nietzsche's philosophical psychology relevant to this topic, is the way in which he characterises the "*sovereign individual*" as an agent that is in control of good or appropriate actions because they are strong enough in character to sublimate their "drives" in the act of willing. In order to make sense of the sovereign individual, I provided a brief account of Nietzsche's drive psychology, and how the drives of our character determine virtue, *not* virtue that determines character. Central to Nietzsche's drive psychology is the concept of the unified self that is exemplified by the sovereign individual in action that has significant ramifications for any educational enterprise.

In the last section of my essay, I argue that Nietzsche's "*sovereign individual*" is a *unified* agent who is in control of good or appropriate actions because they are strong enough in character to sublimate their drives in the act of willing. According to Nietzsche, one obvious place to cultivate the *sovereign individual* is through education; however, he is quite hesitant about this idea because he thinks modern education and educational institutions breed sick young people who are decadent and weak willed because they promote both Christian virtues (e.g. faith, hope, charity, and so on), and herd forming virtues (e.g. obedience, guilt, equality, and so on) (e.g., A, §20–§24 & §42–§58). To overcome this problem, Nietzsche proposes *new* virtues that should figure in a new type of education that is concerned with educating the *will* of the *sovereign individual*, rather than the intellect. In summing up, I finish with a cautionary note that although it is rare, it is possible for weak individuals to become unified and strong in character. In order to bring this about requires Nietzsche's new type of education that is concerned with the painful labour of self-cultivation (*Bildung*), the revaluation of one's values, and a ceaseless striving to overcome obstacles (will to power), so we are *able* to educate ourselves *against* life-negating virtues or vices that make us decadent and weak willed.

Abbreviations

Nietzsche's published works:

- BT: *The Birth of Tragedy*
 UM: *Untimely Mediations*
 HAH: *Human, All Too Human*
 D: *Daybreak*
 GS: *The Gay Science*
 Z: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
 BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*
 GM: *On the Genealogy of Morality*
 TI: *Twilight of the Idols*
 NCW: *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*
 A: *Antichrist*
 EH: *Ecce Homo*

Nietzsche's Nachlass:

- WP: *The Will to Power*
 FE: *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*

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