Nietzsche’s Ethic: Virtues for All and None?

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by

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Introduction

A year ago I read Robert Solomon’s *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach Us* for the first time with the hopes of finding a greater understanding of both Nietzsche and virtue ethics. I was undecided on whether Nietzsche was a virtue ethicist, but I was considering it, simply because of how frequently he mentions virtue and because Aristotle was one of the few major philosophers I knew of that Nietzsche didn’t routinely, vehemently reject.

The beginning and middle of Solomon’s text made me very hopeful for his conclusion. He had not defined his key terms yet, but his groundwork was laid out to demonstrate Nietzsche’s deep concern for character. By the end of Solomon’s fourth chapter, I partially agreed with him. It seemed that Nietzsche may be a virtue ethicist. It was still possible that Solomon’s vision of Nietzsche’s virtue ethic would be flawed, but I was already attempting to find further evidence that would cement Nietzsche’s position as a virtue ethicist. Solomon’s definitions of key concepts made me immediately rethink my position. The breadth of his definitions makes it seem as if few value statements are not ethical statements and few traits are not virtues. Solomon then unveiled the twenty-three virtues that he believed Nietzsche sets up as universal virtues that all should adopt. However, I believe setting a single standard for all to adopt is counter to Nietzsche’s hyper-individualistic philosophy. Attempting to cast all virtuous individuals from a single mold is an anti-Nietzschean project.

This work’s first chapter summarizes Solomon’s argument that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. It details the foundations of Solomon’s position in chapters one, two and three of *Living with Nietzsche* that show Nietzsche’s concern for character both in his writing style and in his
life style. It explains Solomon’s reasoning in the construction of this Nietzschean virtue ethic, and lists the three sets of virtues that Solomon presents as Nietzschean virtues, Aristotelean virtues, and “quasi-virtues.”

The second chapter is a detailed account of Nietzsche’s stance on both morality and virtue. It begins with Nietzsche’s conception of natural and custom morality in *Dawn*, then progresses to his infamous slave-type and master-type moralities. With the descriptive nature of these archetypes explained, I address Nietzsche’s use of the term “virtue.” While Nietzsche does, at times, use virtue in a passion-centric manner, as Solomon describes, this is far from his only use of the word. He also uses it to describe the many different conceptions of virtue from those that the “higher-types” use to those used by the “lower-types,” as well as many others. These many conceptions are used to show Nietzsche’s descriptive approach to virtue, as opposed to a prescriptive approach.

Chapter Three uses evidence from chapters one and two to show that Nietzsche’s philosophy does not fit Solomon’s conceptions of a virtue ethic. Three primary claims are made in this chapter: (1) Nietzsche does not support the universalization required of a virtue ethic, (2) Nietzsche’s work on morality is purely descriptive, and (3) virtue, as illustrated by Nietzsche, is separate from the virtue written on by virtue ethicists because it lacks the requisite “firm and unchanging character” property.

There are many areas of Nietzsche’s work and an area of Solomon’s book that are not addressed in this thesis. I chose to exclude the single chapter of *Living with Nietzsche* that did not directly discuss a Nietzschean virtue ethic, chapter seven. In addition, many of Nietzsche’s traditionally central themes are not addressed, such as *der Übermensch*, will to power, perspectivism (other than summarizing Solomon’s position), eternal recurrence, or *amor fati*. I
primarily only use Nietzsche’s work that directly relates to morality, moral psychology, and virtue, such as his description of slave-type and master-type moralities.
Chapter One
Solomon’s Nietzsche: A Summary

“[T]here exists a duty against which my habit, even more the pride of my instincts revolts, namely to say: Listen to me! For I am thus and thus. Do not, above all, confound me with what I am not!” (EH 1)

1.0 Introduction

Robert Solomon’s *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach Us* attempts to show that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. Solomon begins by demonstrating how Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* style, combined with his perspectivism and genealogical approach shows he is very concerned with the character of his readers, his adversaries, and himself. Solomon then demonstrates how Nietzsche is capable of a life-affirming ethic centered on virtue. Finally Solomon offers three lists of virtues that Nietzsche advocates: Aristotelian virtues, Nietzschean virtues, and “crypto-virtues.” Solomon claims that the virtue ethics idea of narrative creates a novel interpretation of several of Nietzsche’s primary ideas, including making sense of his seemingly contradictory fatalism with his notions of personal responsibility and self-creation. For the purposes of this thesis, however, only the ideas directly affecting the possibility and articulation of Nietzsche’s virtue ethic will be summarized. Solomon’s contention that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist can be split into two parts. The first is a lengthy groundwork for Nietzsche’s possible virtue ethic. It is stressed how concerned Nietzsche is with emotion, psychology and character, as shown not only in his many value statements based on character but also his writing
style, and the broad conception of perspectivism. The second sets up the creation of Nietzsche’s affirmative ethic as based off of three sets of virtues.

1.1 Concern for Character: *Ad hominem* as a Genealogical Approach

Instead of arguing for Nietzsche’s virtue ethic in the customary way, with deep textual exegesis and analytic debate, Solomon takes an existential route to understanding Nietzsche. He writes, “[I]n this book I make no real attempt to ‘rationally reconstruct’ Nietzsche or present him as he might be resurrected as a respectable philosopher, as an ethical theorist, as someone with radical insights as to the nature of truth, justice, and the philosophical way.”¹ So in lieu of constructing a precise argument for Nietzsche as an ethical theorist, Solomon shows Nietzsche’s virtue ethic through the example of his work and character. To achieve this he uses the perspective of Nietzsche as a role model instead of the perspective of Nietzsche as a philosopher. Solomon writes, “that is what this book is about: coming to terms with Nietzsche personally, not as an abstract philosopher nor as an appreciative literary critic nor as a scholar but looking to him as a kind of role model.”² This perspective eschews the precise process of providing necessary reasons for believing Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist, while still providing secondary reasons for believing this interpretation. Solomon utilizes characteristics strongly associated with virtue ethicists to show there is sufficient evidence that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. This begins with showing his concern for character.

¹ Robert Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach Us* p. 13. (Hereafter referred to as *LN*)
² *LN*, p. 5.
Virtue ethics is primarily concerned with the character of the moral agent. Solomon illustrates that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist by first drawing attention to Nietzsche’s deep concern for character and each agent’s history. Although many who are concerned with character are not necessarily virtue ethicists, showing the intimate role that character plays in Nietzsche’s philosophy is Solomon’s way of building evidence for the case that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist.

Solomon believes Nietzsche’s use of the *ad hominem* attack shows his deep concern with character. Solomon boldly defends the *ad hominem* attack as a legitimate form of argumentation that Nietzsche uses in such a way that shows both his perspectivism while also deepening his connection to human characteristics and thus possibly virtue ethics. Solomon describes the classic *ad hominem* fallacy as “a rhetorical technique often dismissed as a ‘fallacy,’ an attack on the motives and emotions of his antagonists rather than a refutation of their ideas.”

Understandably this technique is frequently misused as a last resort by the desperate to abuse their opponents and hope that this abuse passes as a refutation of their claims. An *ad hominem* attack misdirects the reader from the content of the argument to the character of the opponent in question. However, if used not for irrelevant abuse but to show an inconsistency in the opponent’s proposed motivation, then this may be a useful form of argumentation, according to Solomon. “Nietzsche's *ad hominem* arguments did not so much refute the doctrines of religion and morality as undermine them by exposing their sometimes pathetic motives and emotions that motivated them.”

Thus Nietzsche is not attempting irrelevant abuse, rather he is showing that the motivation, emotion and character of those he is opposing affects their ideas in a way that undermines their claims. To exemplify this idea Solomon quotes Nietzsche “The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato on is pathologically conditioned.” (TI “The Problem of Socrates,”

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3 *LN*, p. 20.
4 *LN*, p. 20.
10) Nietzsche attacks what he believes to be the unhealthy center of much of Western ethics. This quote assaults Plato and his philosophical offspring not by showing how their ideas are fallacious, contradictory or any other standard manner of wrong from an analytic perspective. Instead of philosophical posturing like his opponents, Nietzsche simply shows the sickly nature of their philosophy as proof enough of why they should be discarded. Solomon shows how Nietzsche uses this argumentative style against Christianity,

“In attacking Christianity and Christian morality, notably Nietzsche does not remain on the same level of esoteric abstraction as his religious and moral antagonists. What he does instead is to *undermine them*. What could be more devastating against the boastful self-righteousness of some philosophers and theologians than an ad hominem argument that undermines their credibility, that reduces their rationality and piety to petty personal envy or indignation?"^5

While *ad hominem* attacks are normally desperate, insubstantial abuse, Nietzsche uses it in a calculated manner that shows the embarrassing origin of Christian morality’s motivation. If Christian morality presents itself as having the most reverent of motivation and it can be shown that it instead rests on a psychological foundation of resentment, then Christian morality as a whole should be questioned. Understanding its noxious motive and genealogy then should call into question slave morality as a whole. Solomon shows the efficacy of this method when he states “what could be more humiliating than an accusation against a morality that incessantly preaches against selfishness and self-interest that it, too, is in fact not only the product of impotent self-interest, but hypocritical as well?”^6 Some may choose to argue in an analytic, logical fashion against this form of morality, Nietzsche instead attacks its foundation through his

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^5 LN, p 25.
^6 LN, p. 25.
own unorthodox method.

Solomon argues that while in science the facts are less affected by the character of the scientists, in theology, morality, or philosophy, the character of the thinker is much more important:

“Undermining an ‘expert’ means showing that he is not to be trusted, even if his knowledgeability is not in question. But what are we to say, then, in a subject where it is by no means evident what ‘knowledgeability’ would even mean—in ethics (as opposed to the technical study of ethical theories and arguments), in religion (as opposed to the scholarly study of theology or the history of religion), and in philosophy (as opposed to the scholarly study of the history of philosophy or the use of certain techniques of notation and argumentation)? Are there any ‘facts of the matter’ in philosophy? (Nietzsche would certainly say ‘no.’)"

Rather than simply being held to a certain standard of knowledgeability, to a particular set of inarguable facts of the matter, experts in these fields are held to sets of extra standards. Solomon writes that theology is tied to faith, morality is tied to moral action, and philosophy has an integral relationship with the thinker’s ideas and character. While one will argue purely about facts in a field where that is the only criterion for knowledgeability, these fields allow for a different route of argumentation. An impious priest’s opinion on religious matters could be questioned because of his lack of faith, just as a philosopher who does not live her philosophy could be attacked.

Solomon explains that Nietzsche is subject to the above standards. Given an interpretation of Nietzsche (often the first interpretation of undergraduates and laypeople) as the

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7 LN, p. 28.
8 LN, p. 31-32
“boot to the face” philosopher who eschews compassionate emotions and morality in favor of a physically dangerous life-style, he seems somewhat susceptible to a legitimate ad hominem attack. His life would lack an integrity to his own philosophy, since he was known to be a fastidiously courteous person who seemed to invite as little recklessness or danger as any other scholar. However, given a less controversial view of Nietzsche as one who advocates a rich, aesthetically nuanced lifestyle full of intellectual fulfillment rather than a lifestyle of reckless abandonment, he is not subject to his own ad hominem assaults. Solomon believes this is the correct interpretation of Nietzsche’s work.

“Nietzsche is an example and a guide to a ‘rich inner life,’ like his spiritual co-conspirator in Copenhagen Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard celebrated a life of ‘passionate inwardness,’ a life distinguished not by dramatic public appearances (except, perhaps, in print) but by its rich passions, ‘deep’ emotions, exquisite taste, and a sense of personal elegance and excellence.”

Given this interpretation of Nietzsche’s urge for deep inwardness, overflowing passion, and aesthetic enjoyment, Solomon shows that he did live as an example of his writing.

“[F]or Nietzsche as for Kierkegaard, it was the ‘inner life,’ ‘passionate inwardness’ that counted. If we feel sorry for Nietzsche with his ailments and his loneliness we readers may nevertheless envy and admire his bright enthusiasm and genuine ecstasies in life. His enjoyment of his (admittedly gorgeous) surroundings in the Alps, for instance, and his gushing joy on hearing great music were such as few of us have experienced […] Nietzsche experienced a joy and richness of life that was truly exemplary.”

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9 LN, p. 4.
10 LN, p. 31.
This shows that the initial urge use Nietzsche’s own style, to attack via *ad hominem*, is a mistake. He lived as an example of the values that he wrote on.

Solomon also considers how an *ad hominem* attack on Nietzsche could actually further Nietzsche's position. For example, Nietzsche frequently accused those he abused with resentment, yet he himself was hypocritically full of this same resentment. Solomon argues that much like Rousseau and Sartre, Nietzsche's work can be read as an attack against the kind of world that would create a person such as himself. Nietzsche would curse the decadent society that would produce someone so incapable of loving his fate, “if only he *could* accept his life as it is, not wish for another one, or a new age, or a new breed of philosophers, or an *Übermensch*.”

So through the use of an *ad hominem* attack, Nietzsche may even be the case study to make his point more poignantly understood. Nietzsche’s own character advances his philosophy against decadence.

Nietzsche's use of *ad hominem* argumentation reinforces his concept of perspectivism and vice versa, Solomon argues. As Solomon describes perspectivism, “one always knows or perceives or thinks about something from a particular ‘perspective’--not just a spacial viewpoint, of course, but a particular context of surrounding impressions, influences and ideas, conceived of through one's language and social upbringing.”

Each person’s perspective is created from an amalgamation of her childhood memories, family, culture, etc. The summation of this person’s experiences deeply influences her perspective. With each person’s relationship between character and perspective and with the relationship that everyone’s perspective must have in creating her philosophy, it should follow that character must affect each person’s philosophy. Nietzsche’s perspectivism lends itself to attacking a person’s character when it is relevant to the idea being

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11 *LN*, p. 35.
12 *LN*, p. 37.
opposed.

Just as virtue ethics contrasts with consequentialism and deontology by not treating ethics as if it were disconnected from a person’s history and culture, Nietzsche attempts to give context ethics by including the foundational relationship morality has with character. Solomon writes,

“The concepts of philosophy do not have a life of their own, whether in some Platonic heaven or on the blackboards of the philosophy lounge. They are from the start culturally constructed and cultivated, and insofar as they have any meaning at all, that meaning is first of all personal. The[sic] does not mean that they are private, much less personally created, but that they are personally felt, steeped in and constitutive of the character of the person in question.”

Solomon stresses, that like virtue ethicists, Nietzsche is concerned with morality and philosophy, not simply as a single isolated moral action or idea but within the larger context of the action or idea’s origin. With this concentration on origin, the use of ad hominem attacks mirrors Nietzsche’s genealogical perspective he frequently uses in discussing morality. This genealogical approach is used by Nietzsche to show that an idea’s origin is an important aspect of an idea. For example, in On the Genealogy of Morals: An Attack Nietzsche uses this method to show the deleterious nature of slave-type morality by showing that the origin is based on resentment.

This origin shows slave-type morality to be created and motivated by resentment, and this origin is used by Nietzsche to undermine what the herd believe to be the one legitimate morality, i.e. Christianity.

This makes Nietzsche’s genealogical perspective an elaborate and correctly used (as

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13 LN, p. 43.
14 For example, “The slave revolt in morals begins by rancor turning creative and giving birth to values—the rancor of beings who, deprived of the direct outlet of action, compensate by an imaginary vengeance.” GM (I: 10)
opposed to fallaciously used) ad hominem technique. Both the genealogical approach and the ad hominem argument are concerned with understanding the character of the proponent of a view and understanding both the psychological and historical origins of an ideology respectively. What ties these concepts together is that both are concerned with bringing an idea's origin to surface for critique because of the important role origins play in ideologies. To avoid implicating Nietzsche of the genetic fallacy, Solomon shows that the genealogical perspective is not only concerned with historical origin but also with psychological motivation. Condemnations from slave moralities are thus not only triggered by resentment but are also intimately interwoven with it: “Lack of power is not the only cause but the content of resentment, and resentment in turn is not merely the cause but the content of Morality.”15 If origins, and thus character, did not play a part in an idea’s efficacy, then this likely would not be such a cogent point and instead would be committing the genetic fallacy.

If one assumes resentment is not only an emotion but a character trait, then Nietzsche’s interest in resentment implies an interest in character. This continual interest in resentment and thus character, Solomon argues, further aligns Nietzsche with virtue ethics. While Nietzsche attempts to show the weak character of those advocating slave morality, the proponents of slave-type moralities insist on diverting the attention away from character and toward impersonal, universal principles. Solomon believes that this emphasis on impersonal rules “often provide not only a respectable facade for faulty character but also an offensive weapon for resentment. Reason and resentment have proven themselves to be a well-coordinated team in the guerrilla

15LN, p. 56.
war of Morality and moralizing.” Thus advocating universal rules in lieu of a critique of character diverts attention from those of sickly character while advancing their morality of resentment. Nietzsche and virtue ethicists then have a common enemy for common reasons. This is one more clue that Nietzsche’s writing could align with these ethicists.

This line of argument, that Nietzsche’s ad hominem arguments and perspectivism show Nietzsche’s concern for character, begins to align Nietzsche with virtue ethics. Just as virtue ethics is concerned with character, so is Nietzsche. Solomon utilizes this alignment to create a groundwork for sufficient reason that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. Solomon then begins to show a view of Nietzsche’s work that actively utilizes key concepts of virtue ethics.

1.2 Passion as the Root to the Virtues

If Nietzsche does advocate a virtue ethic, it is not one based purely on reason but rather on a variety of emotions. Nietzsche did not reject rationality; however, he did emphasize the reason behind one’s emotions, and vice versa, though many philosophers have seen rationality and emotion as mutually exclusive. Solomon explains “Emotions are not irrational either, a point that Nietzsche explicitly made on a number of occasions and in a number of very different ways. Emotions, he says, have their own rationality. What’s more, he suggests, rationality itself may be nothing more than a certain product or confluence of emotion.” With philosophy's focus on rational arguments, Nietzsche's lack of emphasis on rationality often leads people to deem him

16 Capitalized Morality here refers to a specific variety of morality. While Nietzsche’s perspectivism claims that moral claims are simply a point of view, Morality is advanced as an objective fact of the world. “[T]he morality of the ‘slaves’ is seen as the only moral perspective—it is ‘Morality.’ (I will from now on use an uppercase M to specify this)” LN, p. 47.

17 LN, p. 57.

18 LN, p. 65.
an “irrationalist.” However, philosophy is not, as Solomon explains, completely monopolized by rationality. While this lack of focus on rationality may seem to move Nietzsche further from being a virtue ethicist, Solomon believes it can fit well into an ethic of virtue.

For Nietzsche the emotions play an important role in a person’s character. Each person is responsible for attempting to guide and use his or her emotions in a manner that is life affirming. Nietzsche illustrates the danger and opportunity given by the passions when he writes “All passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity—and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they 'spiritualize' themselves.” (TI 1:5) Passion left uncontrolled will control the agent. For example, anger can “drag” a person down by making him make rash and violent decisions if he doesn’t control his anger. However given self-control, anger can be a useful motivational tool for that same agent. It can motivate him to constructively act against the source of anger if controlled properly.

According to Solomon, with this duality of disaster and spiritual unity, the importance of cultivating these in a manner that is life-enhancing instead of life-stultifying is crucial to developing one’s character. The primary difference between these emotional outcomes is that life-enhancing emotions are those emotions that are sculpted into useful emotions, while the life-stultifying emotions are those which are uncontrolled by the agent. Solomon examines the difficulty in controlling these emotions; “Nietzsche’s frequent treatment of emotions in the metaphor of streams and torrents conveys the strong sense that emotions are forces of nature barely within our control and separate from the self.”19 Although when speaking of the passions, Nietzsche at times uses these hyperbolic references to uncontrollable torrents, it is important to

19 LN, p.82.
see that Nietzsche does retain a sense of responsibility when speaking of the grooming of one’s emotions. Solomon reports, “[b]ut if an emotion is a torrent, it is nevertheless our torrent, and one for which we are ultimately responsible.”\textsuperscript{20} Thus, while Nietzsche advocates that one should live passionately, one is still responsible for the outcomes of these emotions.

Interestingly, Solomon links this passionate attitude toward life with Nietzsche’s will to power, while also showing that it is conducive rather than deleterious to a virtuous life. Without direct textual support, Solomon states “I think that we would do much better to understand the Will to Power as the Will to Vitality, the Will to Life, the Will to \textit{Live}, or, even better, not as a kind of Will at all. It is, instead, an odd and unfortunate name for what Nietzsche really wants to defend, \textit{the passionate life}.”\textsuperscript{21} Instead of will to power being a type of drive, or goal, or use of one's strength, Solomon interprets it as simply living passionately. He draws this idea from Nietzsche's urge to have self-mastery along with his imperative to cultivate life-affirming emotions.

With this ethic centering on living passionately through one’s emotions rather than living exclusively through rationality, this ethic is vastly different from Aristotle’s virtue ethic. While Nietzsche’s ethic could still be one of virtue while diverging strongly from the Aristotelian model, it is important to see the differences he has with this traditional representation of virtue ethics. Because they are so different on both their theories of passions and virtues, Solomon examines these differences closely. One such difference is their relationship with emotion.

“It is obvious that many if not most of the virtues involve concern for the emotions, but too often in a negative way. Courage, for example, has much to do with \textit{overcoming} fear […] Phillipa Foot has famously argued that the virtues are

\textsuperscript{20}LN p. 84.  
\textsuperscript{21}LN, p. 86.
‘correctives’ of emotion […] Most of the traditional vices (avarice, lust, pride, anger, and perhaps envy, though notably not sloth) are readily defined as excesses of emotion”

While Nietzsche advocates for a passionate life, many Aristotelian virtues are simply a lack of emotion (e.g.-temperance, modesty, patience, etc.), while many vices tend to be an excess of emotions (e.g.-pride, lust, anger, etc.). This lack of emotion in Aristotle's ethic is noted by Nietzsche when, in the midst of renouncing any ethic that is centered on happiness, he states “that tuning down of the affects to a harmless mean according to which they may be satisfied, the Aristotelianism of morals.” (BGE 198)

Solomon ventures to define a kind of flourishing with which he believes both Aristotle and Nietzsche would agree. Flourishing for both philosophers then is “living a life worth not only living but celebrating, in which greatness and in particular greatness of soul (megaloopsychos) is a much more central consideration than feeling happy and content or achieving success in one's career.” Although Nietzsche and Aristotle seem to disagree on the foundational roots of a virtue ethic, according to Solomon, their outcome is similar.

Earlier, life-stultifying and life-enhancing emotions were mentioned, however, little in the way of example was given. Nietzsche calls on us to navigate through these emotions, but it is most helpful to see how he navigates through them personally. Resentment may be a prime example. While it can be shown to be able to “drag us down”, it also has its uses, according to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche has a very complex relationship with resentment. According to Solomon, although resentment is frequently an emotion under attack by Nietzsche, it can certainly be

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22 LN, p. 87.
23 LN p. 88.
shown to have its uses. Nietzsche’s sense of responsibility sheds some light on this relationship. Nietzsche obviously has a strong sense of responsibility but would rather forgo most instances of resentment. However, the two are somewhat tied together. Solomon states “though one can ascribe responsibility without resentment (for example, in praise and admiration), one cannot easily imagine resentment without the ascription of responsibility.”

Solomon believes Nietzsche is particularly focused on this negative emotion because of its relationship to responsibility. To be resentful, one must absolve oneself of responsibility and place it on another. Thus, to be a morality of resentment is to be a morality that is other-focused instead of self-focused. It inherently adopts the blaming perspective instead of a more self-oriented perspective that would be more likely to lead to life-affirmative cultivation. Solomon argues that the reason resentment is so negative to Nietzsche is because it focuses on abusing others rather than improving oneself. In its most moribund form resentment is focused on crippling those who are virtuous while feeling morally superior to the would-be virtuous individual. Solomon concludes “This [ad hominem arguments] may not ‘refute’ either Morality or resentment but it does expose one pretentious form of resentment whose primary purpose is to deny or inhibit the virtues and enjoy a judgmental self-righteousness at the expense of excellent action and enthusiasm.”

Thus resentment can be a venomous emotion whose ineffectual jealousy focuses on sullying the greatness of others for one’s own pride.

In Solomon’s view, however, resentment is not always a malign emotion. He believes for Nietzsche it can be a virtuous emotion because it can be exceptionally clever, articulate, and critical. Against the claim that resentment is ineffectual, Solomon writes “Our revolutionaries are

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24LN, p. 89.
25LN, p. 93.
men and women of resentment.” Solomon shows the use of resentment when he expresses “It is the slave who is sufficiently ingenious to do what even Nietzsche despairs of doing: he or she invents new values. And it is the master, not the slave, who becomes decadent and dependent and allows him- or herself to be taken in by the strategies of resentment.” The conquered are those who must be creative enough from resentment to create new values, and it is they who do not succumb to the riches of society that threaten to turn one soft and decadent. Because it is resentment that is the catalyst to this guard against innervation, it should be a virtue rather than a vice. Resentment can be shown to be an emotion that, if used correctly, can be exceptionally useful. However, if one is thoughtlessly led by it, it can certainly lead to a sicker outcome.

Life-affirmation and life-stultification are almost synonymous to Nietzsche’s writings on strength and weakness. What is meant by strength or weakness by Nietzsche? Solomon quickly rejects that simply political force or health or willingness to participate in physical conflict or even independence is exactly what Nietzsche means by strength. Solomon posits that it is an aesthetic distinction. Strength, in short, is good taste, while weakness is simply banality. It is the strong who are able to find creativity and forge beauty even in a life riddled with sickness and suffering. Although there must be some amount of weakness in any who feel resentment (for to feel resentment one must feel thwarted in some manner), even the strongest among us feels resentment at some point, according to Solomon. One difference between the weak and the strong is that the strong are able to discharge this resentment through activity, while the weak are unable to do this and are thus stuck simmering in their resentment.

Resentment is more than the vindictive, pernicious, venomous emotion that is most frequently mentioned by Nietzsche. There is a kind of camaraderie among the resentful. It is the

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26LN, p. 103.
27LN, p. 103.
camaraderie of the disenfranchised, those who suffer a collective injustice. Thus a frequent discharge of resentment is justice. This feeling of communal injustice is not to be reviled, writes Solomon, but possibly even praised. “We do not so criticize personal resentment for some great offense or oppression; indeed we empathize with it, agree with it, perhaps support it and praise it as noble. So too we do not so criticize resentment when it is in the name of a much larger group.”

Thus Solomon posits that the combination of group resentment and compassion creates a possibly noble sentiment: one deeply involved with our concept of justice. Solomon acknowledges Nietzsche’s disdain for this form of justice “Nietzsche’s attack on the familiar sense of justice was an attack on the purely vindictive, ‘reactive’ emotions by which the weak and incompetent tried to ‘get at’ those we were strong and successful.”

It was the life-stultifying use of resentment at the core of the common concept of justice that Nietzsche rejects instead of justice as a whole. Solomon continues “Justice for Nietzsche—though not what most of us would call ‘justice’—is that superior sense of being ‘above’ all slights and beyond vindictiveness.”

Thus when those who affirm life utilize justice it is a wholly different, positive concept.

Emotion instead of pure reason is the foundation for Nietzsche’s virtue ethic in Solomon’s interpretation. One should live passionately, while still being the master of one’s emotions. This controlled yet passionate life will allow for a set of virtues that are centered on the cultivation of overflowing emotions instead of what Nietzsche would see as a mediocre mean of extremes that Aristotle advocated. With the foundations for a particularly unique virtue ethic created, Solomon can now illustrate the finer details of a Nietzschean virtue ethic.

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28 LN, p. 110.
29 LN, p. 113.
30 LN, p. 113-114.
1.3 Building Nietzsche’s Ethic: Virtues for All

Solomon begins his analysis of Nietzsche’s ethic with a comparison between Kant and Aristotle. He concludes that while Nietzsche shows an immediate separation from both thinkers because of his lack of reliance on an ethos or a practice, due to his urge to create new values without influence, Solomon argues that Nietzsche is still returning to Aristotelian values rather than simply separating from Kantian modern values (e.g., duty, detached rationality, etc.). One reason that Solomon believes Nietzsche is urging for a return to Aristotle instead of a completely new ethic is that “there is no context, in other words, within which the new virtues we are to 'create' are to be virtues, for a virtue without a practice is of no more value than a word without a language.” With no practice to relate to, there is no way to gauge the value or coherence of a virtue. Solomon asserts that Nietzsche's new ethic needs some form of practice to be coherent. One possible practice that Nietzsche could base his ethic off of is Aristotle’s.

After Nietzsche's need for a practice is voiced, Solomon shows the nuanced separation between morality, morals, and ethics and how this affects Nietzsche's work. Solomon states

“One of the meanings of morality that preoccupies Nietzsche, and which I shall be employing here, is the definition provided by Kant: a set of universal, categorical principles of practical reason. Morals, on the other hand, is a term much less precise, and I shall be using that term much as Hume used it in his Inquiry Concerning the

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31LN, p. 121. “ethos—an established way of life”
32Alasdair MacIntyre, in After Virtue describes practice as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and participative of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” P. 175
33LN p. 122.
Principles of Morals: morals are those general customs and acceptable ways of behaving that are generally agreeable in a particular culture and characterize a good person—leaving quite open the all-important nonconceptual question of what is to count (and in what context) as a good person. Ethics, finally, I take to be the overall arena in which morality and morals and other matters concerning the good life and how to live it are located.”34

For Solomon morality are those rules which we believe must be universalized (ideas that both consequentialism and deontology utilize). Morals is a looser term that is more relative to each particular culture than is morality. While Morality is, as we saw earlier, when one believes that his morality is the only true morality. Finally ethics includes all questions of Morality, morality and morals along with questions concerning conceptions of the good life, which could also include aesthetics, personal preferences, individual values, etc. Thus a life dictated purely by Morality and morals could be a drab existence with little joy or virtue, but it would include the obedience to duty so important to Kant. Ethics, for Solomon, however, includes debate over morality, excellence, beauty, purpose, etc. He believes Nietzsche's project is largely concerned with the possibility that humanity is emphasizing Morality to the detriment of ethics.

"Morality is not all of ethics, and it can be viewed not only as a distortion of ethics but as anti-ethics [...] This is not to claim that Morality is antithetical to the good life (although Nietzsche sometimes holds that strong view) but rather that, at the very least, insofar as Morality is justifiable, it must be conducive to the good life.”35

Advancing Morality over ethics can deprive us of those qualities that we regard as part of the good life. Solomon argues that while Nietzsche does not reject all of morals and Morality, he

34 LN, p. 125.
35 LN, p. 126
does believe that to be warranted, these must be conducive to an ethic as well. Morals that reject
the ethical would simply be life-negating, a great “nay” to life, while an ethic that denied morals
would be nothing but energetic self-indulgence. Solomon argues that both Aristotle and
Nietzsche advocate for ethics and that these ethics were ones of practice rather than ones of
principle. Both Nietzsche and Aristotle are more concerned with action and character rather than
abstraction and rational rule following. The design of an ethic of practice is one that is inherently
justified because it is embedded in a society’s *ethos*. This is why Aristotle would think it a
question asked by a fool of wrong upbringing to ask “Why should I follow this ethic?”

Solomon sees Nietzsche as bringing ethics back to Aristotle. He shows that both
philosophers were functionalists, naturalists, teleologists, elitists and that Nietzsche's
übermensch shared a similarity to Aristotle's *Megalopsychos*. Both thinkers assume from the
start a difference in people's abilities and a focus on the very best among them. While Aristotle
justified this via the health of the *polis*, Nietzsche justifies this by aesthetic advance, Solomon
argues. Solomon advances a particularly aesthetically oriented virtue ethic, from his defining of
virtue to what he finds to be essential in Nietzschean virtue ethics. “What is essential to this view
of ethics is that the emphasis is wholly on excellence, a teleological conception. The virtues are
both conducive to and constitutive of rich aesthetic experience and it is such experience that
justifies both the virtues and the life that embraces them.” In this interpretation, it is through
aesthetic experience that Nietzsche gains justification and possibly some kind of *ethos* and/or
practice. While Aristotle founded his ethic on the *ethos* of his *polis*, Nietzsche's revaluation of
values is left with no such *ethos* because of the nature of his urge to create new values. Without a

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36 Although Philip Kain’s article “Nietzsche, Virtue, and the Horror of Existence” argues for a greater separation in
these two thinkers’ ideal person.
37 LN p. 131.
culture to tie down the *ethos*, a viable ethic may not be able to be formed. Solomon declares “Ethics is an expression of ethos”\(^{38}\) then boldly states because an *ethos* is so essential to an ethic and Nietzsche lacks such an *ethos* “there is no such thing as 'creating new values' in Nietzsche’s sense.”\(^{39}\) Solomon quickly rejects that Nietzsche (or anyone else) is able to create wholly original values. Ethics does not operate in a vacuum. It requires a society and *ethos* to base its justification on. Instead of new values, Solomon believes Nietzsche turns to a less ambitious goal—a return to old values.

With Nietzsche’s similarities to Aristotle articulated, Solomon begins his analysis of “what would Nietzsche make of us?” Solomon is interested in understanding what virtues Nietzsche would advocate us adopting. However, one problem with Solomon’s interpretation of Nietzsche's possible virtue ethic is that Nietzsche “suggests that every virtue is unique, and even by being named it thereby becomes something *common*. That would make the very idea of a general account of virtues, especially the Nietzschean virtues, impossible.”\(^{40}\) Solomon claims this is simply Nietzschean hyperbole. He begins his description of a Nietzschean virtue ethic with a definition of virtue from Christine Swanton. He summarizes her definition of virtue as “a trait—specifically a human excellence whose possession tends to enable, facilitate, make natural the possessor's promoting, expressing, honoring, and appreciating value; or enhancing, expressing, honoring or appreciating valuable objects or states of affairs which are valuable.”\(^{41}\) With this value oriented definition of virtue, Solomon then leads Nietzsche into a utilitarian virtue ethics.

“And the stress on value is important because I would read Nietzsche as insisting

\(^{38}\) *LN*, p. 135.
\(^{39}\) *LN*, p. 135.
\(^{40}\) *LN*, p. 139.
\(^{41}\) *LN*, p. 140.
that no virtue is good ‘in itself,’ but only as it contributes to something else of value, such as personal style and character, the production of beauty, an ecstatic personal experience, or the cultural enrichment of society. In that sense, Nietzsche embraces a generalized utilitarianism.\(^42\)

Each Nietzschean virtue then will gain its value extrinsically, e.g.- courage is only good as far as it grants the user utility. Solomon does at least guard against Nietzsche’s possible utilitarian oriented virtue ethic by stating that what counts as good is of course what a master-type would see as good (vigor, art, culture, etc.) instead of what a slave-type would believe to be good (pleasure and complacency).

Solomon compiles three lists of virtues that he believes Nietzsche would want us to adopt. He explains that even though Nietzsche frequently mentioned a move to the creation of new values, Solomon cannot imagine how one would do this. Since Nietzsche named no new values but rather praised many ancient values, Solomon believes that Nietzsche would settle for recasting the past, as long as this is breaking from the present tradition of decadence and complacency. Thus Solomon compiles three sets of virtues that capture Nietzsche’s ethic without inventing new values. The first is a list that comprises virtues Solomon believes Nietzsche would recast from Aristotle: courage, generosity, temperance, honesty, honor/integrity, justice, pride (megalopsychos), courtesy, friendship, and wittiness. In explaining each virtue Solomon expresses that even Nietzsche’s Aristotelian virtues are not virtues of moderation but instead virtues of overflowing. Solomon argues that virtues for Nietzsche are those passions that gush from the great souled person but that are carefully cultivated so that they are not life-negating. Even temperance for Nietzsche is not a virtue of moderation, yet it is still one of self-control.

\(^42\) LN, p. 140.
“But it makes quite clear that Nietzsche’s view of temperance, if only he were physically and temperamentally up to it, is that it is not a virtue of moderation. It is a virtue of self-mastery, somewhat akin to surfing on the torrent of one’s desires.” Temperance then is less about restraining one’s desires and more about choosing the optimal desires. Thus each of the Aristotelian virtues that Solomon lists is considerably different from Aristotle’s ideal but each has its influence from Aristotle.

Next, Solomon constructs a set of uniquely Nietzschean virtues: exuberance, “style,” “depth,” risk-taking, fatalism (amor fati), aestheticism, playfulness, and solitude. Each of these virtues embodies a collection of value statements Nietzsche has written on. For example, risk-taking is exemplified by Nietzsche’s writing rather than by the physical risk that is often associated with risk-taking. His earliest published book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, exemplifies this risk. Solomon reports “his first ‘academic’ book, was a conscientious flaunting of academic standards: no footnotes, no staid philology, filled with contemporary references, verging on blasphemy in philological quarters in his treatment of Socrates and Euripides.” To risk one’s physical life may be pointlessly reckless but to risk one’s career for the sake of art is a virtue “Great artists take chances! Not to do so is to fall back into comfortable conformity and give up the quest for greatness altogether.”

The third list is the list of “crypto” virtues, a list of quasi-virtues or proto-virtues that seem to frequently be needed in the formation of virtue rather than being virtues themselves. While not completely explained, these “crypto” virtues, Solomon promises, will make us question the nature of virtue in a unique way. He briefly prefaces this list,

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43 LN, p. 152.
44 LN, p. 162.
45 LN, p. 162.
“Finally, there are the crypto-virtues. I call them crypto-virtues because they are problematic as virtues. The problem is not their frequency or consistency of mention in Nietzsche but their status as virtues, for various reasons. Indeed, they throw open again the entire question, ‘What is a virtue?’”  

The primary characteristic of this third set of virtues then is their questionable nature of virtues. They are on the fringe of what would normally be deemed virtue. Crypto-virtues make us question where to “draw the line” between virtues and simply beneficial characteristics. The crypto-virtues are as follows: health, strength, “hardness,” egoism, and responsibility. Several of these cannot entirely be controlled by the individual and that makes their status as virtues questionable. For example, while health does enable one to appreciate value, it seems less a character trait one can be responsible for and more a prerequisite for virtue and value appreciation. While Nietzsche certainly seems to value health, Solomon makes this a crypto-virtue, instead of simply a virtue, because of the lack of responsibility over one’s health. He states,

“the question is whether good health can sensibly be called a virtues (or illness a vice). The question turns, in part, on the degree to which one believes oneself responsible for good health, and, even then, the health itself might well be understood as the result of certain virtues (e.g., ‘clean living’) rather than constitutive of them.”  

In summation, Solomon lays out an argument for a Nietzschean virtue ethic in three parts. First, he shows how Nietzsche’s ad hominem attacks, genealogical approach, and perspectivism lead to an invested concern for character, with all three approaches showing character as an

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46 LN, p. 167.  
47 LN, p. 168.
essential part of a person’s philosophy. This concern for character is not meant as hard evidence for a Nietzschean virtue ethic; however, it urges the reader to begin seeing Nietzsche as a virtue ethicist because this concern for character is essential for both Nietzsche and virtue ethicists.

Second, Solomon shows the emotion based (rather than purely reason based) foundation for this ethic. Rather than being a tame ethic that is concerned with finding the mean between extremes, Solomon shows that this passion based ethic is focused on Nietzsche’s characteristic overflowing emotions and self-mastery. Third, Solomon constructs the particulars of this ethic. Nietzsche advocates for virtue and human excellence but this in itself does not create a virtue ethic.

However, Solomon defines ethics in a way that includes all practices that attempt to attain value. This certainly makes Nietzsche’s urge for self-mastery an ethical enterprise. Solomon believes this ethical enterprise should not be concerned with creating new values as Nietzsche seemed to frequently advocate. This is largely due to new values having no practice to found themselves upon. Instead of new values then, Solomon believes Nietzsche’s philosophy is better interpreted as a return to Aristotelian values. With this return to Aristotelian values, Solomon unveils Nietzsche’s virtues.

While Solomon’s interpretation illustrates much of Nietzsche’s writings on ethics to be prescriptive, a close examination may give reason to think that Nietzsche’s ethical thoughts are more frequently voiced as descriptive. This differing interpretation may show that Solomon’s claim that Nietzsche has a virtue ethic is suspect. We must examine Nietzsche’s approach to understanding morality as well as his position on morality as a whole and his specific ideas on value and virtue in order to adequately judge whether Solomon is correct.
Chapter Two
Nietzsche on Ethics

2.0 Introduction

“Thus nobody up to now has examined the value of that most famous of all medicines which is called morality; and the first step would be-for once to question it. Well then, precisely this is our task.” (GS 345)

Unlike many other philosophers who write on ethics, a great deal of Nietzsche’s actual writing on morality is not concerned with identifying a fundamental moral principle and showing how to practice it. Instead he is concerned with both describing morality itself and, once we have a clear understanding of it, how we should be approaching it. This is not to say he does not make value claims (of which he makes many), but these are secondary to his describing what morality is and how we should address it. This descriptive project is exemplified when Nietzsche prefaces his only work purely dedicated to understanding morality with

“[W]e need a critique of all moral values; the intrinsic worth of these values must, first of all, be called in question. To this end we need to know the conditions from which those values have sprung and how they have developed and changed […] The intrinsic worth of these values was taken for granted as fact of experience and put beyond question […] What if morality should turn out to be the danger of dangers?”

(GM Preface: 6)
On the Genealogy of Morals: An Attack is very appropriately subtitled An Attack since Nietzsche uses much of this book to attack a central moral presupposition, namely, that “Nobody, up to now, has doubted that the ‘good’ man represents a higher value than the ‘evil,’ in terms of promoting and benefiting mankind generally, even taking the long view.” (GM Preface: 6) While those attempting to understand morality by making prescriptive claims begin with this assumption, Nietzsche begins his descriptive project by questioning this presupposition.

He sustains this exceptionally critical perspective on what many take as given in morality and, in finding nobody who, like him, questions foundational aspects of morality, he reports with ire

“Why is it then that I never yet encountered anybody; not even in books, who approached morality in this personal way and who knew morality as a problem, and this problem as his own personal distress, torment, voluptuousness, and passion? It is evident that up to now morality was no problem at all but, on the contrary, precisely that on which after all mistrust, discord, and contradiction one could agree—the hallowed place of peace where our thinkers took a rest even from themselves, took a deep breath, and felt revived. I see nobody who ventured a critique of moral valuations.”(GS 345)

Nietzsche is disappointed that, while people are very concerned with making the correct moral decisions, they have not become critical about what morality itself is. While they continue to make moral claims, they do not second guess their own motivations or the basic moral psychology behind them. Even when discussing the origin of morals these ethicists retain the presuppositions that their ethics contain. Instead of understanding their presuppositions or their moral psychology, they attempt to distance themselves from their own motivations by claiming to approach ethics dispassionately and objectively. Nietzsche believes that the dispassionate
approach to ethics that so many ethicists utilize has only enervated moral thought. This distant, calculating ethic is exemplified by Nietzsche’s view of utilitarianism and utility. In critiquing a utilitarian account of the origin of value, Nietzsche writes

“We notice at once that this first derivation has all the earmarks of the English psychologists’ work. Here are the key ideas of utility, forgetfulness, habit, and finally, error, seen as lying at the root of that value system […] The notion of utility seems singularly inept to account for such a quick jetting forth of supreme value judgments. Here we come face to face with the exact opposite of that lukewarmness which every scheming prudence, every utilitarian calculus presupposes—and not for a time only, for the rare, exceptional hour, but permanently.” (GM 1:2)

The utilitarian account for the origin of values then is characterized by the presupposition that they have already utilized in their ethic, that a good action is one that accrues utility. Assumptions such as these are the components of ethics that Nietzsche is attempting to dispel.

2.1 Custom & Natural Morality

Nietzsche’s own first protracted ideas on morality, its value, and origin are in *Dawn*. Here he places morality into two distinct positions. First, he claims that moralizing is a natural occurrence. Just like any other drive, its purpose is to aid the individual in thriving in his environment.48 Nietzsche describes the first position while he is making the continual

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48 This value should be distinctly separated from a utilitarian conception of thriving in one’s environment. While a utilitarian emphasizes the value of a universal and generalizable utility, Nietzsche will insist that each person and his environment will be unique enough to require a differing value system. While a hedonist utilitarian believes that
comparison between humanity’s use of ethics and the animal kingdom’s attempts at security and survival.

“The beginnings of justice, as of prudence, moderation, braver – in short, of all we designate as the Socratic virtues, are animal: a consequence of that drive which teaches us to seek food and elude enemies. Now if we consider that even the highest human being has only become more elevated and subtle in the nature of his food and in his conception of what is inimical to him, it is not improper to describe the entire phenomenon of morality as animal.” (D 26)

This expresses two important ideas concerning morality. First, early developments of moral inclinations and virtues are natural (if one takes “animal” to be synonymous with natural) occurrences in each person. They are a manner of fitting into one’s environment more securely and thriving. These early moral inclinations then are not simply culturally dependent ideas that are completely derived from one’s society but natural drives that aid in survival. Second, the Socratic idea of separating man from animal because of humanity’s reason is an error. Morality is simply a skill humanity has, similar to an animal using camouflage or any unique survival mechanism, to cope with our environment.

An example will elucidate this early form of morality (hereafter called natural morality for clarity). When in a society that is frequently at war, values that promote this society’s ability to excel at war should be valued (courage, honor, self-sacrifice, physical prowess, etc.). However if that society becomes peaceful, these values should be eschewed for more helpful values. If the now peaceful nation requires values to promote healthy trade with their neighbors then a separate set of values is required (cultural sensitivity, bartering ability, economic intelligence, etc.). This

pleasure is the foundational value, Nietzsche will claim that, that may be true for Bentham, but not for the artist who values suffering because it inspires her work.
new growth of values allows for the aggrandizement of certain abilities that ensure the survival of the community. Just as if an animal discovered a certain hunting technique no longer worked, the animal would need to adapt, stop using the old technique, and discover a new one to survive.

The second position Nietzsche presents is that of morality from custom (hereafter referred to as custom morality). It is the non-reflective following of what was natural for one’s predecessors. Nietzsche is particularly critical of this form of morality.

“Morality makes stupid—Custom represents the experiences of men of earlier times as to what they supposed useful and harmful—but the sense for custom (morality) applies, not to these experiences as such, but to the age, the sanctity, the indiscussability of the custom. And so this feeling is a hindrance to the acquisition of new experiences and the correction of customs: that is to say, morality is a hindrance to the creation of new and better customs: it makes stupid.” (D 19)

In this form of morality, what was useful for one society becomes untouchable, unquestionable, holy. This is an inflexible code that stunts the change and evolution of a society’s morality. This inflexibility is perpetuated by the seriousness that surrounds this kind of ethic. In subsequent work Nietzsche continues to attack this attitude of seriousness:

“And again and again the human race will decree from time to time: ‘There is something at which it is absolutely forbidden henceforth to laugh.’ The most cautious friend of man will add: ‘not only laughter and gay wisdom but the tragic, too, with all its sublime unreason, belongs among the means and necessities of the preservation of the species.’” (GS 1)

Tragedy, joyous wisdom, laughter: to deny any of these would only serve to impede the natural progression of human life. Prohibiting laughter to guard one’s ideals, as custom morality does,
only serves to inject an artificial longevity into an idea that should have been criticized then either abandoned or reconfigured. The natural process needed to evaluate ideas that are either a bane or aid to life then is unnaturally stunted by this custom morality.

To use the earlier example, in custom morality the society that transitions from war-oriented to trade-oriented would still retain its values that promote war over peace. In this example, the society would be following these values not because they are useful but because they are encapsulated in inquiry-denying sanctity. Instead of courage, physical prowess and honor being good because they advance the health of the society, they are treated as intrinsically valuable traits. Thus, custom morality is not adopted for its usefulness but simply because it commands. Nietzsche states “morality is nothing other (therefore no more!) than obedience to customs, of whatever kind they may be; customs however are the traditional way of behaving and evaluating…What is tradition? A higher authority which one obeys, not because it commands what is useful to us, but because it commands.” (D 9) Custom morality is the blind following of tradition simply because it is tradition. Nietzsche claims that the most moral person in this system of ethics is he who is most willing to sacrifice himself to custom. This idea of self-sacrifice is the antithesis of natural morality, which is developed and followed for human thriving rather than being followed for its own sake. While Nietzsche criticizes custom morality because of its inhibition of change and growth, he also criticizes it for its inhibition of self-reflection and critical thinking. While those in natural morality may understand morality as a tool for thriving, those of custom morality did not themselves devise this morality and thus do not understand the origin of this morality. They simply obey because it commands.

In both custom and natural morality, however, moralists continue (whether consciously or not) to use morality as a tool. For instance, Nietzsche illustrates how morality is used as a
manner of inflicting socially acceptable schadenfreude-esque cruelty upon others “The chastity of the nun: with what punitive eyes it looks into the faces of women who live otherwise! How much joy in revenge there is in these eyes! - The theme is brief, the variations that might be played upon it might be endless but hardly tedious.” (D 30) Morality then can be a tool for the infliction of covert cruelty. The nun uses morality vindictively to inflict guilt on those who she feels are sinning and enjoys a hidden joy in this. Kathleen Higgins explains the psychological motivation of the moralizer well when she writes “The concept of guilt allows one to feel superior to those labeled guilty, and the person who feels a failure is the one most likely to crave and easy route to a sense of personal superiority. Nietzsche discusses this mechanism of deriving a sense of superiority from one’s stance in moral judgment as an expression of vindictiveness.”

The nun example shows this motivations for easy superiority while generalizing it to moralizing. Similar covert motivation can be seen in many instances of moralizing. Nietzsche disdains this use of moral superiority: “Now he is becoming virtuous, but only so as to hurt others with his virtue. Do not pay him so much attention!” (D 275) Further, Nietzsche defends those who knowingly adhere to an egoistic ethic. When addressing those who attack egoism in favor of their own non-egoistic moralities, Nietzsche states

“by devoting yourselves with enthusiasm and making a sacrifice of yourselves you enjoy the ecstatic thought of henceforth being at one with the powerful being, whether a god or a man, to whom you dedicate yourselves: you revel in the feeling of his power, to which your very sacrifice is an additional witness. The truth of the matter is that you only *seem* to sacrifice yourselves: in reality you transform yourselves in thought into gods and enjoy yourselves as such […] In short, it is *you*

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Nietzsche is criticizing the disingenuous arguments made by seemingly non-egoistic moralizers.\(^{50}\) While the advocates of non-egoistic morality (e.g. Christian morality) speak on the value of self-sacrifice, their actions are anything but self-sacrificial. The covert advantage gleaned from “self-sacrificial” actions is important here. While a Christian may act in a way that is seemingly to his disadvantage, before God he is gaining an advantage. Although he may be sacrificing a gain in the physical world, the thought of gaining God’s favor allows for an overall gain in his position. Not only does he gain this after-life advantage but he enjoys the feeling that psychologists in altruism studies term the “helpers high.” Simply put, he feels euphoria for doing what he perceives to be altruistic actions. The intoxicating feeling of being exalted and good is the excess that Nietzsche speaks of here. In the self-deception that one is sacrificing oneself for the greater good, there is an intoxicating sense of self-rapture. Nietzsche’s philosophy replaces this false sense of goodness from the pseudo-sacrifice of the self, with the more honest assessment in his view that motivation for morality is egoistic because of its roots in natural morality.

2.2 Master-type and Slave-type Moralities

The two moralities distinguished in *Dawn* can be correlated with Nietzsche’s later concepts of master (sometimes referred to as noble) and slave-type moralities. The first elaboration on master and slave type moralities is in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

\(^{50}\) It should be differentiated that moralizers are lay-people who opine about a morality, while an ethicist would be a philosopher who systematically examines morality.
“There are master morality and slave morality—I add immediately that in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other—even in the same human being, within a single soul.” (BGE 260)

It is important to understand that when speaking of master-type and slave-type moralities, Nietzsche is not referencing individuals as masters and slaves. Rather, as seen in the above passage, he is illustrating moral archetypes. The master type morality could be thought of as an extension of natural morality, while slave-type is an elaboration on custom morality. Noble-type moralities are robust, energetic, individualistic types that Nietzsche describes with some amount of admiration.

“The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, ‘what is harmful to me is harmful in itself’; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things, it is value-creating. Everything it knows as part of itself it honors: such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow.” (BGE 260)

The noble type does what Nietzsche so passionately endorses: she creates value. She does not ask for the values of others but unabashedly creates her own. She sees what is harmful or helpful to her goals, and she places value on those qualities that reduce the harmful and advance the helpful. Parallels can immediately be drawn to the natural morality of Dawn that founded value on thriving in one’s environment. Here noble morality seems to be a matured form of natural morality. These noble types glorify those parts of themselves that allow them to excel, and this is
where they find value. This attitude toward morality allows for a constantly evolving morality for each individual, just like natural morality.

Converse to this group are the slave-types. They reject the master-type’s morality, Nietzsche argues, because they are not strong enough to embody the values that make the master-types thrive. However, they creatively persuade themselves that the master-types are not as joyous as they seem, so that they may ameliorate their own feelings of jealousy.

“The slave’s eye is not favorable to the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and suspicious, subtly suspicious, of all the ‘good’ that is honored there—he would like to persuade himself that even their happiness is not genuine. Conversely, those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored—for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.” (BGE 260)

The slave-types do not simply reject the master-type’s morality but substitute it with their own. Slave morality, instead of enhancing life and driving its adherents to higher goals, acts as a kind of palliative treatment to life; never advancing it but at least easing its pain. The slave-type is focused on the diminishing of suffering and the promotion of pleasure; it is a calculated morality of utility. Opposite of this, the master-types are not seeking ease, nor are they calculative in their moralizing. This is also where master morality separates itself from natural morality. While natural morality calculates advantage and disadvantage, master morality is less an attempt at gaining anything and more an aggrandizement of the natural overflow of each master-type’s drives. For example, an advocate of natural morality will see the uses of courage and then
promote courage so that he will garner the fruits of courage. An advocate of master-type morality, though, will act courageously, because it is a natural overflow of her drives; she will attach value to acting on this overflow. Master-type moralities are most dependent upon each individual’s personal drives and the causes of these drives.

While he introduces his two moral arch-types in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche continues fleshing them out in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. This text elaborates that while the master-types make their moralities and virtues dependent upon their individual drives, the slave-types base their morality off of a reaction to and rejection of the master-types moralities. They cannot achieve what the master-types achieve, thus they deem the strengths of these masters evil and the opposite of these values good. Directly before *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche illustrates this “fox and the sour grapes” mentality of the incapable.

“Indeed, I often laughed at the weaklings who believe themselves good because their paws are lame!”( Z, “On the Sublime Ones” 92) If they were simply stronger, Nietzsche implies, then they would adopt those values they deem evil rather than rejecting them. Instead they deem their weakness virtue and they deem the strength of others vice:

“There is nothing very odd about lambs disliking birds of prey, but this is no reason for holding it against large birds of prey that they carry off lambs. And when the lambs whisper among themselves, ‘These birds of prey are evil, and does not this give us a right to say that whatever is the opposite of a bird of prey must be good?’ there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such an argument—though the birds of prey will look somewhat quizzically and say, ‘We have nothing against these good lambs; in fact, we love them; nothing tastes better than a tender lamb.’ To expect that strength will not manifest itself as strength, as the desire to overcome, to appropriate,
to have enemies, obstacles, and triumphs, is every bit as absurd as to expect that weakness will manifest itself as strength.” (GM, I 13)

Slave-type moralities then, not only glorify their own weakness, but they also deem the opposite of them evil. This good/evil dichotomy is useful, for it ties the collective hands of all who would have greater power than the slave-types. Here Nietzsche sets up the difference between good and evil versus good and bad. The master-types have no reason to project their opposites as evil; however, there is still use for the amoral dichotomy of good and bad. An example will clarify the difference between bad and evil. If a thief were to rob a slave-type person, he would declare this an act of evil. Not only is it stressed descriptively that the act has harmed the slave-type person, but there is a prescriptive element to this statement. The thief should not have done that: there is a moral connotation and shame on the person who commits the evil act. Conversely, if this happened to a master-type person, he would declare it bad. This is purely descriptive: it is a comment on the negative outcome for the master-type person without implying a “should” or “ought.” For the slave-type person to act in a manner that harms another is to act evilly or to act from vice, while there is no moral equivalent for the master-type person. The master-type simply follows his drives and deems them virtues. If the master-type has a surplus of drives that lead to courage, then he should utilize this courage and deem it valuable. There is no need for the master-type to then deem cowardice evil; that would be superfluous. While the master-types place value on their own strength, there is no need for them to urge others to adopt this strength. There is even less reason to believe that those who do not exhibit this strength should value it and then attempt to replicate it. However, slave-type morality will urge the strong to adopt their weaknesses.
Slave-type morality requires that all must act as if “their paws are lame” so that all have equal access to success and achievement no matter how great or mediocre. Slave morality allows for two benefits. First, it forces the more powerful to rein in their abilities that would overwhelm the slave-types. This effectively levels the playing field. Second, although they are powerless in confrontation with the master-types, they can feel superior because they “choose” to be kind, forgiving, merciful, etc. They are unable to harm, and thus feel superior because they treat their inability as a personal choice:

“We can hear the oppressed, downtrodden, violated whispering among themselves with the wily vengefulness of the impotent, ‘Let us be unlike those evil ones. Let us be good. And the good shall be he who does not do violence, does not attack or retaliate, who leaves vengeance to God, who, like us, lives hidden, who shuns all that is evil, and altogether asks very little of life-like us, the patient, the humble, the just ones.’ Read in cold blood, this means nothing more than ‘We weak ones are, in fact, weak. It is a good thing that we do nothing for which we are not strong enough.”' (GM I, 13)

Here evil is used from the slave-type perspective as almost synonymous with strength. One can imagine Nietzsche extending this slave-type mentality to read as “The strong are, in fact, strong. It is a terrible thing that they reach for those goals that they are strong enough to reach for.” Thus while the master-types value their own abilities and the overflow of their drives, slave-types value their inability to actively thrive and conquer. They creatively see this defeat and inability as virtuous and the ability and strength of others as vicious. This allows the slave-type person to look down on those who are strong and feel a sense of strength themselves. The comforting thought is then available for those unable to retaliate that they did not strike down their
adversaries, not because they cannot but because they are strong enough (morally speaking) to allow their enemy mercy (i.e.- they “turn the other cheek”). If their advisory is truly deserving of wrath, God will see to it. This soothes cognitive dissonance while also bolstering the comforting belief that they are good and strong and their enemy is evil.

Advocates of slave-type morality have justified their lack of ability, but the master-types continue to thrive and because of this thriving, they harm the slave-types. A harm that, rather than being born of overt malignance, is more likely from simple neglect. Master-type people are simply unconcerned with the benefit of others. In a world of finite resources this lack of concern will inevitably lead to the stronger people taking the resources that the weaker need to survive. To rein in the smothering success of master-type people, slave-type people must convince them to restrain themselves. In a stroke of creativity born of resentment, the slave-type moralities deem their moralities universal to hobble the master-types. They accomplish this universalization by claiming that an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good God has created their morality. This creation of a perfect God not only universalizes their morality, it also makes it objective. To claim that you have found the one morality that will make all thrive no matter the environment and challenges they face seems a claim beyond any normal vanity. However, to claim it is the will of an all-mighty God is not seen as hubris but devotion to an infallible deity. With the claim that their morality is universal and objective because it is founded upon God, these slave-types form the foundation of their morality on values of otherworldly origin rather than a natural origin.
2.3 Slave-type’s Universalization

Slave-type morality has placed its values on the rejection of what master-types find valuable and they have deemed that these values are God’s values. These values are resting on a foundation that Nietzsche does not believe exists and are guarded by a form of protection that Nietzsche believes is illegitimate. These ill-founded values guard themselves from criticism through the vanguard of sanctity and seriousness. While Nietzsche views this sanctity as a guard against inquiry, slave-types see it as virtuous veneration. This is useful in preserving their morality and their self-image. Similarly, the earlier mentioned virtues of kindness, mercifulness, and forgiveness give the powerless and defeated a chance to reclaim their dignity and the illusion that they could be powerful too, if they were not so good. Slave-type virtues will revolve around both giving value to their ineffectual nature and giving the most comfort. Master-type people instead focus on mastering themselves and their environment. Each master-type morality will be different because each master-type person will suit it to himself and his environment, but there will likely be similar underlying themes of exuberance, passion, and self-discipline among master moralities. The thought that all master-type moralities should be the same would horrify the master-type. A single morality could not capture the needed values for each master-type person. While each of these master-type values would be individual and without any regard to the slave-type people, the slave-type people will attempt to universalize their slave-type virtues to ensnare the master-types.

“On the other side, the herd man in Europe today gives himself the appearance of being the only permissible kind of man, and glorifies his attributes, which make him tame, easy to get along with, and useful to the herd, as if they were the truly human
virtues: namely, public spirit, benevolence, consideration, industriousness,
moderation, modesty, indulgence, and pity.” (BGE 199)

Nietzsche seems to find this contemptuous not only for their tame virtues but because they believe these virtues to be “the truly human virtues.” To universalize any morality or set of virtues is the antithesis to master-type morality. Each individual needs to forge her own morality based on the drives most predominant in her. If a master-type individual adopts a virtue, she adopts it because she already lives this virtue through her actions and claiming the virtue aggrandizes her actions. It is antithetical to master-type morality to universalize moralities because everyone does not have the same set of drives. For example, while one person’s set of drives makes her motivated to seek creative gratification, another person may have a set of drives that motivates him to seek more physical gratification and prowess. The first person will be more creative and will value creativity more than the second. It makes little sense to claim both should value creativity when the second has no use for this virtue. This could even be harmful if a society were to emphasize creativity to such an extent that this second, less creative individual felt guilt for his lack of participation in this virtue. To deem any value universal would be to ignore the individual expressions of each individual.

The heart of Nietzsche’s position regarding morality is the critical stance he takes with morality itself. Morality is not an intrinsic good or a set of standards to be followed simply because they command. Instead, morality is a set of values used to navigate through one’s environment. Master-types will simply glorify the traits they find in themselves that aid in their mastery of the world. Slave-type morality uses morality as a means, a useful tool, to enhance their self-image and to rein in the power of the master-types.
While slave-type moralists will attempt to universalize their morality and their virtues, Nietzsche’s conception of master-type virtue will be starkly individual.

“The popular medical formulation of morality that goes back to Ariston of Chios, ‘virtue is the health of the soul,’ would have to be changed to become useful, at least to read: ‘your virtue is the health of your soul’. For there is no health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures.” (GS 120)

For Nietzsche the discovery of what is “healthy for the soul” is done individual by individual, for one person’s cure may be another’s poison: “Do I advise you to chastity? In some people chastity is a virtue, but in many it is almost a vice.[…] Those for whom chastity is difficult should be advised against it, or else it could become their road to hell – that is, the mud and the heat of the soul.” (Z, “On Chastity” 39-40) To pursue virtues that do not come naturally to you could be more damaging than empowering. The belief that one set of virtues or moral rules should apply to all people is an idea that Nietzsche continually combats throughout his career. As early as Human, all- to-Human he champions this idea. In explaining the evolution of human morality, he places individually created morality as the most mature form of morality.

“Eventually he acts, on the highest step of the hitherto existing morality, according to his standard of things and men; he himself decides for himself and others what is honourable, what is useful; he has become the law-giver of opinions, in accordance with the ever more highly developed idea of what is useful and honourable. Knowledge enables him to place that which is most useful, that is to say the general, enduring usefulness, above the personal, the honourable recognition of general, enduring validity above the momentary; he lives and acts as a collective individual.” (HAH 94)
Nietzsche places the individual who is able to manufacture morality according to his own standard as above those who simply adopt an existing morality. Nietzsche persistently advocates this concept into his late period. For instance, in *The Anti-Christ* he states “A virtue has to be our invention, our most personal defense and necessity: in any other sense it is merely a danger.” (AC 11) Each individual should create his own personal virtue, or it is merely destructive miming. Further, Nietzsche proclaims ardently through Zarathustra “’This - it turns out - is my way - where is yours?’ That is how I answer those who asked me ‘the way.’ The way after all – it does not exist!” (Z, “On the Spirit of Gravity” 156) Thus, there is no single way to live that is the best way, there is no single virtue or set of virtues that guarantee a good life for any and all.

2.4 Nietzsche on Virtue and Virtues

Nietzsche does seem to advocate for this individualist view of morality. This severely individual morality calls for each person to search for what values he is naturally inclined toward and deem them virtues. Classically it was thought that it was reason that guided one to the virtues; passion takes a similar role for Nietzsche. Nietzsche writes on this in several separate aphorisms but the clearest and most evident passage is when he writes

“Once you had passions and named them evil. But now you have only your virtues: they grew out of your passions.

You set your highest goal at the heart of these passions, and then they became your virtues and passions of pleasure.

And whether you stemmed from the clan of the irascible or the lascivious or the fanatic or the vengeful:
Ultimately all your passions became virtues and all your devils became angels.

Once you had wild dogs in your cellar, but ultimately they transformed into birds and lovely singers.” (Z, “On the Passions” 25)

To fully understand this quote we must observe the relationship between drives, passions, and virtues. I posit that Nietzsche is using drives and passions interchangeably, so that when he speaks of either, he is speaking on the basic components of human motivation. The drives themselves are amoral, they give birth to the virtues because individuals claim virtues that embody their drives. For example, a person with an overflow of creative ability will value the virtue of creativity to aggrandize this overflow. Once one realizes the amoral nature of the passions, it is a simpler task to glorify the product of these drives. Drives birth virtues when one places value on what one is already motivated to accomplish. Even drives that once were deemed “evil” may give birth to virtues. Thus one’s “devils” becomes one’s “angels.” Because of the radically different emotional and physiological climate in each person, if each were to cultivate his own individual passions into mastered virtues, then his list of virtues would tend to be very separate from anyone else’s virtues. Nietzsche encourages this project of cultivating one’s character.

“To ‘give style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work.

51 D, 38 “[I]t [a drives] is attended by either a good or bad conscience! In itself it has, like every drive, neither this moral character nor any moral character at all”
at it. […] Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!” (GS 290)

Even the holistic crafting and reworking of one’s character is seen as an artistic endeavor for Nietzsche. Using the natural emotions and character one has randomly acquired through chance of parentage and environment to form one beautiful style out of one’s personality is paramount in Nietzschean virtue. Being an individual, singular taste is even above the taste being “good or bad.” This is rife with the possibility for misinterpretation, so I must take pains to clarify here. This instance of “good or bad” should be taken as an aesthetic interpretation, not as a moral interpretation. Nietzsche specifically separates the terms “good and bad” from “good and evil” with the former pertaining to amoral value and the later pertaining to moral value. By using “good and bad” Nietzsche is not advocating for an individual morality regardless of actual moral merit between them. Instead he is claiming that each taste should be individual even if it lacks aesthetic value. Thus, although beauty and style of character are important to Nietzsche, even they play a secondary role to a unique and solitarily crafted character.

Oddly, Nietzsche seems to warn against attempting to have too many virtues. He writes that we are lucky if we have one virtue rather than any more

“And now nothing evil grows anymore out of you, unless it is the evil that grows from the struggle among your virtues.

My brother, if you are lucky then you have one virtue and no more: thus will you go more easily over the bridge.

It is distinguishing to have many virtues, but it is a hard lot. And many went into the desert and killed themselves because they were weary of being the battle and battlefield of virtues. My brother, are war and battle evil? But this evil is necessary,
envy and mistrust and slander among your virtues are necessary." (Z, "On the Passions" 25)

One need not personify the virtues to see Nietzsche’s meaning in this passage. When people commit themselves to many different virtues, eventually these virtues will contradict one another. Inevitably a situation occurs where the agent will have to choose between two competing virtues. One can easily imagine a situation where an advocate of a set of virtues has to decide between being friendly or industrious; truthful or merciful; modest or honest, etc. Nietzsche seemed to think this eventual contradiction and “battle” between the virtues to be a necessary case of their existence. He also seemed to believe that this battle could be too much for some people to bear.

Virtue for Nietzsche is the recognition and fulfillment of one’s drives. Each individual has a different set of passions that she is naturally inclined toward, so this discovery and cultivation is an individual project. However, if a person reaches beyond her abilities and attempts to cultivate too many virtues, this battle could be more stressful (or deadly) than fruitful. While Nietzsche outlines a general conception of virtue, he also writes passages regarding specific virtues. While this gives an interesting clue as to what virtues Nietzsche may personally advocate, it also gives an interesting interpretation on old virtues. For example,

“Courage as cold valorousness and intrepidity, and courage as hotheaded, half-blind bravery – both are called by the same name! Yet how different from one another are the cold virtues and the hot! And he would be a fool who believed that ‘being good’ happens only when heat is applied: and no less a fool he who wanted to ascribe it only to coldness! The truth is that mankind has found hot and cold courage very useful” (D 277)
Here Nietzsche dissects the classic virtue of courage as a more complex and varied set of behaviors than should be given a single name. Not only are there separate kinds of courage, but because both are useful, it would be myopic to claim one is bad and the other good simply because one is “hot” and the other “cold.” Again, this is an example of Nietzsche describing virtue rather than prescribing any specific virtues.

Nietzsche may even lay claim to several virtues of his own. Although it is not clear if this list is prescriptive or descriptive, or even if it is ironic or earnest, Nietzsche does write two lists of virtues. In his earlier work he writes, “The good four.- Honest towards ourselves and whoever else is a friend to us; brave towards the enemy; magnanimous towards the defeated; polite – always.” (D 556) And in a later work he writes, “remain master of one’s four virtues: of courage, insight, sympathy, and solitude.” (BGE 284) Even if these lists are both earnest and prescriptive, I argue that rather than seeing these virtues as universal virtues for all to adopt, Nietzsche is making an example of the virtues that have worked for him. The emotions prevalent in his life, along with his personal style and the goals he aligned them with, made these seven virtues particularly useful. He cautions some from attempting some of his virtues just as he earlier warned against all adopting chastity “Whatever one brings into solitude grows in it even the inner beast. On this score, solitude is ill-advised for many.” (Z, “On the Higher Man” 237) Solitude has been a virtue to Nietzsche, but this does not mean that it will be helpful for all. In solitude one grows without influence. One’s bad qualities as well as good qualities will grow undisturbed by outsiders. Nietzsche believes his set of qualities were more good than bad, thus solitude is a virtue for him. For another who needed the influence of others to guide him away from his more petty or pernicious attributes, solitude would be a detriment.
From beginning to end, Nietzsche’s writing on morality has consisted of the description of moralizing rather than the prescription of ethical ideals. Unlike an ethicist who would prescribe a specific, systematic ethic, Nietzsche has been the critic of ethicists. His work has consisted of a lengthy, although segmented, evaluation of moral psychology rather than morality proper. His earliest work on morality shows an evaluation of moral types, custom morality and natural morality. Instead of giving a detailed description of one or both of these with an urge for the reader to adopt it, as is customary of ethics, Nietzsche paints with a broad, descriptive brush. Nietzsche continues this approach with slave-type and master-type moralities. Understanding the motivation and origin of these moralities is much more important than designing an ethic out of one or both of these. His use of virtue seems to follow this trend. Nietzsche describes virtue at length but never urges the reader to adopt his virtues. An urge to adopt his specific virtues would be indicative of slave-type morality. Instead, Nietzsche shows his own virtues as an example, not of what virtues everyone should acquire, but to show how one person has deviated from the standard adoption of others’ virtues.
Chapter Three

Ethical Contortions: Fitting Nietzsche into Virtue Ethics

3.0 Introduction

With the evidence that Solomon presents for Nietzsche’s virtue ethic explained and a brief summarization of what Nietzsche wrote on ethics, morality, and virtue made clear, we can finally assess the persuasiveness of Solomon’s claim that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. Solomon’s reasoning can be given in three parts. First, he shows through Nietzsche’s genealogical approach and his ad hominem style that Nietzsche is concerned with character. Second, Solomon illustrates how Nietzsche’s philosophy can fit into a specific virtue ethic, given certain definitions of “virtue” and “ethic.” Finally, he argues that Nietzsche’s many value statements can be interpreted as endorsements of certain, specific virtues.

I will argue that Nietzsche is not a virtue ethicist. First, his passages on virtue were written in a descriptive fashion rather than a prescriptive, so he never meant to make the normative claims that a virtue ethicist would have to make. Second, Solomon’s rather elastic definitions of “ethics” and “virtue” are far too broad. Finally, if Nietzsche’s individualism is taken seriously, his philosophy could not endorse the universalized virtues a virtue ethicist would require.
3.1 Against a Prescriptive Interpretation

Although many of Nietzsche’s passages could be interpreted in a way that aligns his writing with a virtue ethic, Solomon’s attempt at labeling Nietzsche as a virtue ethicist is overreaching the evidence given. While Nietzsche is concerned with morality and speaks on virtues frequently, I argue that like most of his passages on morality and ethics, these passages are to be interpreted descriptively instead of prescriptively. When writing on slave and master-type moralities, Nietzsche is not giving normative claims about how humans should act. Instead he is describing two broad archetypes of morality. When he speaks of virtue he is speaking in the same manner. Instead of directly advocating for specific virtues or showing how one can attain specific virtues, Nietzsche frequently illustrates what das volk believe to be virtues, what the noble-type believe to be virtues, what a useful interpretation of virtue could be and what psychological explanation can be given for the genesis of virtue in each person. His many ways of speaking about virtue lends itself to this descriptive perspective. For example

“A man’s virtues are called good depending on their probable consequences not for him but for us and society: the praise of virtues has always been far from ‘selfless,’ far from ‘unegoistic.’ Otherwise one would have had to notice that virtues […] are usually harmful for those who possess them […]. When you have a virtue, a real, whole virtue […] you are its victim. But your neighbor praises your virtue precisely on that account.” (GS 21)

Here Nietzsche describes the covert sacrifice of the individual by the communal through the adoption of virtues. Counter to Solomon’s claim, this shows that, although Nietzsche does write on virtue, he is far from prescribing virtue and even farther from prescribing specific virtues.
This quote excludes Nietzsche from the prescription of virtues unless there is direct evidence that he would willingly and hypocritically praise others’ virtues for his benefit.

Nietzsche does seem to show that he personally has and/or values many ‘virtues;’ however, this is far from endorsing a virtue ethic or endorsing that anyone else should adopt his own beloved virtues. Solomon assumes that Nietzsche’s personal endorsement or possession of characteristics is synonymous with the prescription of specific virtues. For example, Solomon makes the uncontroversial claim that Nietzsche is witty, then more controversially, because Nietzsche is witty, wittiness is a virtue “Certainly one of the virtues for which Nietzsche sets himself as his own best example is the virtue of wittiness.” Without direct textual evidence of Nietzsche’s endorsement of wittiness this would-be virtue has little reason to be on any list of Nietzschean virtues. Further, not every admirable characteristic of a virtue ethicist should be viewed as a potential virtue. Aristotle surely had many good character traits that he did not endorse as virtues. For example, he may have been exceptionally creative but did not believe creativity had the attributes to warrant it being a virtue. One must then ask, does wittiness have the attributes needed to be deemed a virtue? As you will recall, Solomon’s virtues must be able to “enable, facilitate, make natural the possessor’s promoting, expressing, honoring, and appreciating value” but he does not make it clear how wittiness participates in any of these value garnering traits. “Wit is distinctively ‘clever’ (or tries to be) and it is almost always verbal. It consists for the most part of wordplay, and the point is to shift the focus back (preferably admiringly) to the speaker.” This description of wittiness seems more like an argumentative technique rather than a personal character trait. One uses wit like many other argumentative

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52 LN, p. 158
53 LN, p. 140
54 LN, p. 158
styles in writing. This is in sharp contrast to the more common view of virtues being sustained character traits. If Solomon views wittiness as a character trait instead of an argumentative technique, he gives little reason for his readers to believe the same. Even if Solomon did show how wittiness is a virtue under this definition, this does not mean Nietzsche also endorses this trait as a virtue. It seems unwarranted to claim that this is a Nietzschean virtue without showing specific evidence for Nietzsche’s textual endorsement of this trait. Otherwise we could name any number of traits Nietzsche had and call them all Nietzschean virtues. Many of Solomon’s examples of virtues that Aristotle and Nietzsche would both agree upon suffer this same problem. While some of these virtues do seem to require a great deal of evidence to demonstrate Nietzsche’s support, (with courtesy being a particularly contentious example\(^{55}\)) some are obviously endorsed textually by Nietzsche. Thus, while Solomon does take pains to show how each virtue interacts with and supports Nietzsche’s philosophy, he does not give the evidence that Nietzsche would believe these to be universal virtues for all.

As I have shown, if Solomon constructs a list of Nietzschean virtues, his job is twofold: he must show that Nietzsche endorsed these characteristics, and he must show that these characteristics are virtues. Further, this job is only part of the evidence required to show that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist, as I will later show. Unfortunately, frequently Solomon refrains from giving direct textual evidence of Nietzsche’s approval of characteristics while he also leaves the verification of their status as virtues vague. An additional example of the vague status of Solomon’s virtues is courtesy “Nietzsche certainly saw getting along with others (philosophical polemics notwithstanding) as of paramount importance. In any case, rudeness betrays a lack of style, a lack of self-discipline, and a poverty of perspective.”\(^{56}\) While it does

\(^{55}\) LN, p. 156
\(^{56}\) LN, p. 156
seem that Nietzsche valued courtesy, if one equates courtesy with politeness, courtesy’s status as a virtue is simply assumed as granted. Much like the earlier example of witiness, Solomon does not show how courtesy “enables, facilitates, make natural the possessor’s promoting, expressing, honoring, and appreciating value.” It is simply left to the reader’s imagination. Nietzsche’s endorsement of a characteristic does not guarantee that it is a virtue, nor vice versa; however, Solomon seems to assume that they do. Nietzsche could value a trait that does not meet Solomon’s requirement of a virtue, while there could certainly be traits that do qualify for Solomon’s definition of virtue that Nietzsche does not value. With Solomon’s elastic definition of virtue a bizarrely vast number of traits could be considered virtues that one would be hard pressed to prove that Nietzsche endorses. However the reverse, showing that Nietzsche values a trait that does not fall under Solomon’s definition of virtue, should be a difficult task. This broad definition of virtue makes the term ineffectual. To fully understand this problem, I will now turn to the problem of Solomon’s key definitions.

3.2 Redefining Virtue and Ethics

In attempting to categorize Nietzsche as a virtue ethicist, Solomon specifically deems Nietzsche a utilitarian virtue ethicist, “Nietzsche embraces a generalized utilitarianism, so long as we insist only on a ‘noble’ interpretation of what is to count as ‘good consequences.’” This may not be an incorrect interpretation; however, it certainly requires much greater exposition and

57 “The good four.- Honest towards ourselves and whoever else is a friend to us; brave towards the enemy; magnanimous towards the defeated; polite – always.” (D 556)
58 Because the German word for polite, Höflichkeit, is synonymous with courteous, there is reason to equate these two terms.
59 LN, p. 140
60 LN, p 140
argumentation to warrant than Solomon supplies. With Nietzsche’s frequent assault against utilitarianism as a secular version of Christian morality, Solomon’s remark is surprising. Nietzsche frequently aligns the search for utility with herd morality and thus with banal complacency.\textsuperscript{61} While Solomon attempts to assuage the concern that he is grouping Nietzsche with those who seek more soporific utilities by stating that Nietzsche is a utilitarian only “so long as we insist only on a ‘noble’ interpretation of what is to count as ‘good consequences,’”\textsuperscript{62} this contentious claim still requires some amount of textual evidence. With Nietzsche’s frequent attacks on utilitarianism, one has to wonder if it is utilitarianism’s prohibition on suffering and their slim conception of utility that Nietzsche is against or if he disagrees with an even more fundamental element of utilitarianism. Thus grouping Nietzsche with such company requires some amount of evidence to justify.

In attempting to fit Nietzsche’s philosophy into this utilitarian virtue ethics system, Solomon contorts several important words’ definitions, most importantly, his definitions of “ethics” and “virtue.” Solomon claims to use Christine Swanton’s definition of virtue:

“a trait—specifically a human excellence whose possession tends to enable, facilitate, make natural the possessor’s promoting, expressing, honoring, and appreciating value; or enhancing, expressing, honoring or appreciating valuable objects or states of affairs which are valuable.”\textsuperscript{63}

Virtue for Solomon will be any excellence that promotes value or the appreciation of value.\textsuperscript{64}

With no connection to common traits of virtues, such as being a sustained disposition, or having

\textsuperscript{61} Cf. BGE 225, 228 & 260  
\textsuperscript{62} LN, p140  
\textsuperscript{63} LN, p. 140  
\textsuperscript{64} Unfortunately, Solomon does not directly cite a page number for his definition of virtue which he claims to have borrowed from Swanton. Instead he cites the entirety of Swanton’s book. Solomon’s direct quote could not be found in Swanton’s \textit{Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View}. Swanton does supply an overt definition that strongly diverges
a relationship with morality,\textsuperscript{65} this definition allows for ridiculous and trivial virtues. Depending on how Solomon defines excellence,\textsuperscript{66} this could allow for some traits to be virtues that no other virtue ethicist would consider to be virtues. For example, snow appreciation could be a possible virtue. If having excellence is defined as simply being skilled, then skillfully crafting objects out of snow, staying dry while being inundated with snow, and knowing how to throw a good snowball could be excellences that lend themselves to the appreciation and promotion of snow value. Any excellence that enhances value could be a virtue with these definitions. Bizarre virtues such as this are easily discarded in more standard definitions of virtue.

Although there is no single agreed upon definition of virtue, it is important to see how Solomon’s definition differs from more traditional definitions of virtue. Also, although crafting a definitive definition of virtue is a valuable endeavor on its own, for the purposes of this project, I need only show the stark differences between Solomon’s definition of virtue and common conceptions of virtue to support my position. What Solomon writes on is fundamentally different from the concept of virtue on which other virtue ethicists write. This inflation of the term allows Solomon to claim that more philosophers speak on virtue than is reasonable. With this definition any person speaking on valuable character traits or excellences could be termed a virtue ethicist, even if, like Nietzsche, they lack any ethical system. There are three differences between Nietzsche’s possible virtue ethic and most contemporary versions of virtue ethics. Two of these differences are found in Solomon’s definition of virtue, while the third is located in his

\textsuperscript{65} Although this definition utilizes value, value can be separate from morality (e.g. aesthetics’ search for value through beauty).

\textsuperscript{66} While Solomon does insist that “The emphasis on excellence is important, for not any ‘good’ trait will do” (LN p. 140) his definition of excellence is never given, thus leaving his definition of virtue exceptionally vague.
interpretation of Nietzsche. First, in traditional virtue ethics, virtues are sustained, deeply inculcated characteristics. Second, virtues are usually considered moral dispositions instead of simply amoral preferences. Third, virtue ethicists are concerned with sets of virtues that are universalized to all humans, rather than understanding differing sets of virtues between each individual.

At the heart of many definitions of virtue is the need for virtues to be sustained dispositions. This begins with Aristotle defining virtue as a static characteristic rather than an emotion or capacity, “the [virtuous] act must spring from a firm and unchanging character.”67 This view of virtue has remained in more contemporary conceptions of virtue ethics. “It [virtue] is, indeed a character trait—that is, a disposition which is well entrenched in its possessor, something that, as we say ‘goes all the way down.’”68 This distinction between an enduring aspect of character rather than simply a habit or an unspecified, ephemeral trait has thus remained a key aspect of virtue in virtue ethics. Of course Nietzsche is interested in personal improvement, although this interest is in a particularly broad and unspecific sense. Nietzsche does insist on cultivating your own virtue; however, his vague yet unique use of virtue is certainly different from naming specific virtues that virtue ethicists advocate the universal adoption of. For instance:

“My brother, if you have one virtue, and it is your virtue, then you have it in common with no one.

To be sure, you want to call her by name and caress her; you want to tug at her ear and have fun with her.

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68 Hursthouse, Rosalind, “Virtue Ethics” (2012)
And behold! Now you have her name in common with the people and have become the people and the herd with your virtue!

You would do better to say: ‘Unspeakable and nameless is that which causes my soul agony and sweetness and is even the hunger of my entrails.

Let your virtue be too high for the familiarity of names, and if you must speak of it, then do not be ashamed to stammer about it.” (Z, “On the Passions” 24)

This emphasizes not only the severely individual nature of virtue, but it also highlights the ephemeral qualities of a Nietzschean virtue. Unlike a virtue that traditional virtue ethicists prescribe, this is a private, nameless, indistinct virtue that, Nietzsche claims, one should never urge others to adopt. This passage shows that this personal form of virtue that Zarathustra advocates is unspecified virtue. This vague quality does not lend itself to the extended cultivation of specific, enduring characteristics that is so prevalent in many definitions of virtue. This sustained quality is vital in a virtuous action, Aristotle writes “the [virtuous] act must spring from a firm and unchanging character.”69 Virtue, as conceived by Aristotle, must be from enduring characteristics, while for Nietzsche one’s indistinct, hopefully unnamed, virtue gives little ability to sustain as an unchanging characteristic.

To cultivate a virtue, one needs to understand that virtue. The ill-defined nature of the virtue that Nietzsche speaks on eludes defining, thus it also eludes being a purposefully sustained and cultivated characteristic. Surely it is possible to have an unnamed virtue that remains with an agent and grows with the agent, unfortunately with this form of virtue that seems to be a rarity rather than a key component. The absence of specific, firm character from Solomon’s definition of virtue does make it easier to claim that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. When Nietzsche does

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69 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2, 1105a:34-35
advocate for virtue, it is not the specific virtues of a virtue ethic, and there is little evidence that
the virtue he advocates is the firm, unchanging character that is commonly required by virtue
ethicists.

Second, Solomon’s definition of ethics is overly broad and disconnected from prevalent
conceptions of ethics. He defines ethics as “the overall arena in which morality and morals and
other matters concerning the good life and how to live it are located.” This definition of ethics
is an umbrella term that includes Solomon’s idea of morals “those general customs and
acceptable ways of behaving that are generally agreeable” and his definition of morality “a set of
universal, categorical principles of practical reason” along with any “other matters concerning
the good life.” Including this final vague statement opens this definition to the union of all value
as ethical value. While philosophers usually separate the values of aesthetics from those of
ethics, this definition disregards this separation. Normally one differentiates between the value of
a good painting from the value of a moral action; however, Solomon’s definition of ethics allows
for any such value to be claimed under ethics. Nietzsche certainly holds certain values but this
does not guarantee that these values are in the realm of ethics. Combining these two disparate
values into one pushes Nietzsche into the ethical sphere without the need for evidence that these
values are ethically based rather than aesthetically based.

One may assert that enjoyment and aesthetic value is an essential part of the good life;
Nietzsche certainly thinks so, “Only as an aesthetic product can the world be justified to all
eternity.” (BT 5) When writing on the virtue of wittiness Aristotle also gives this impression,
“relaxation is also an essential part of life, and since it includes spending one’s time in

70 LN, p. 125
71 LN, p. 125
amusement, it seems possible here, too, to display good taste in our social relations.”^72 However, although amoral virtue could assist in the achievement of the good life, it misses a vital part of virtue ethics. In defining virtue, Bernard Williams writes, “a virtue being a disposition of character to choose or reject actions because they are of a certain ethically relevant kind. […] it [virtue] will come back into respectable use. In that proper use, meaning an ethically admirable disposition of character.”^73 (emphasis added) The good life that virtue ethics attempts to claim is an essentially moral concept. To have undifferentiated moral and amoral virtues ignores the prominence of morality in the conception of the good life.

While Solomon combines ethics and aesthetics, Robert Louden shows how virtue ethics is not even an ethical theory by conventional 20th century standards, rather it is an anti-theory.^74 Louden gives a much more specific account of ethics that, unlike Solomon’s account, engages directly with literature both in the broad field of ethics and in the specific field of virtue ethics.^75 Louden specifically attempts to understand ethics from how it is actively used in the ethics literature. In attempting to determine if virtue ethics is an ethical theory, Louden addresses twelve properties of traditional justice-based ethical theories. Louden’s properties of an ethical theory are: problem solving, belief testing, formalism, explicitness, decision procedure, universalization, objectivity, abstraction, systematic hierarchy, an avoidance of moral dilemmas, an imagined best way of life and the possibility of moral expertise. ^76 Although this is not a definitive list of criteria all ethical theories must hold, it is a thorough outline for what

^72 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book Four, 1127b:35-1128a:1


^74 Louden describes anti-theory as a form of anti-theoretic axiology that is divorced from the twelve concepts common to ethical theory while still supporting ethical reflection.

^75 Although Solomon links his ideas of morality with Kant and morals with Hume, his use of ‘ethics’ is not connected to any historical or contemporary use of ‘ethics.’

^76 Full definitions can be found in Robert Louden’s, “Virtue Ethics and Anti-Theory” p.95-98
foundational ethical theories commonly consist of. Because virtue ethics theories frequently only participate in several of these qualities, Louden argues that these theories are different enough to justify separating from ethical theories such as consequentialism or deontology which regularly meet in all twelve criteria.

The precision of Louden’s list is sharply contrast against Solomon’s use of “ethics.” Solomon’s exceptionally broad definition of ethics allows for any value to be included in ethics, from saving a life to finding aesthetic value in a snowy landscape. This broadening of ethics allows Solomon to deem what would simply be an amoral description of value (e.g.- a simple expression of preference) into the “arena” of ethics. If ethics is defined in a way that captures what other contemporary ethicists mean by “ethic,” then it may not be possible for Nietzsche to be interpreted as advocating for ethical value. For example, James Rachels defines moral philosophy\textsuperscript{77} as “the attempt to achieve a systematic understanding of the nature of morality and what it requires of us.”\textsuperscript{78} To call Nietzsche’s approach to morality or ethics systematic is to misrepresent both his methodology and his attitude toward systems. Nietzsche consistently holds a distrust of systems.

\textit{“Beware of systematisers!”—Systematisers 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.”} (D 318)

Then in his later work he sustains this position. “I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.” (TI: “Maxims and Arrows” 26) This

\textsuperscript{77}While Solomon and I both differentiate between ‘ethic’ and ‘moral’ Rachels does not. Thus I take these two terms to be synonymous in his work. When he defines moral philosophy, he is also defining ethics for the purposes of his book.

\textsuperscript{78}James Rachels, \textit{The Elements of Moral Philosophy} p. 1
distrust of systems leads Nietzsche to write his philosophy without the requisite system that an ethic requires. Further, the form of obligation that Rachels’s definition requires of an ethic seems incompatible with Nietzsche’s writing. That Nietzsche’s philosophy “requires” us to perform actions in the same normative manner that an ethic does is odd with his lack of prescriptive claims (as we saw in Chapter Two).

Because Nietzsche makes frequent value statements and shows a concern for the advancement of particular values, in Solomon’s interpretation, Nietzsche participates in ethics. This is due to Solomon’s definition of ethics, “Ethics, finally, I take to be the overall arena in which morality and morals and other matters concerning the good life and how to live it are located.” This definition not only uses a phrase that encompasses practically all value statements, “and other matters concerning the good life and how to live it,” but it also uses the vague term ‘arena.’ Without giving an explanation for this term, one is left to assume its meaning. One could assume that ‘arena’ means any form of argumentation. If this is the intended meaning then ethics is constrained to the space of debate. This narrow interpretation removes ethical actions from our idea of ethics though because it only considers ethical debate. An additional, plausible meaning for ‘arena’ could be the space in which anyone makes statements regarding morals, morality, and the good life. If this is the intended meaning of ‘arena,’ then any statement concerning value becomes part of one’s ethic. Making disparate claims such as snow is beautiful, increasing welfare is useful, or to live a good life one should attend to one’s health, is to participate in ethics. That these moral and amoral claims should share a single category as ethical statements misses their differences. A separation between normative and non-normative statements is crucial to the defining of ethics. Solomon’s definition disregards that. The

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79 LN, p. 125
normative ‘ought’ that is implied when one states a moral rule such as “One ought to keep one’s promises” must be differentiated from the prudential ‘ought’ used in statements, such as “If one wants to be cultured, one must like Chopin.” Conjoining the normative and non-normative in defining an ethic dissolves what one means when one mentions ethics.

Solomon does show that Nietzsche is concerned with virtue and ethics under these unusually broad definitions of virtue and ethics; however, definitions this broad rob the words of the meaning normally associated with them. These two ideas are different enough from usual definitions that labeling them “virtue” and “ethics” is misleading. Given any virtue ethic that utilizes the core aspects of common definitions of virtue, or ethics, deeming Nietzsche a virtue ethicist would be a much more daunting (if not impossible) task. To understand the final difference between Solomon’s interpretation of a Nietzschean virtue ethic and contemporary virtue ethics we must understand Nietzsche’s individualism and the required universalization of virtue ethics.

3.3 Nietzsche’s Individualism

When Nietzsche writes on values, virtue in general and specific virtues, there are several concepts that separate his thoughts from both classic and contemporary virtue ethics. First, when Nietzsche makes value claims towards certain virtues, he is not universalizing these statements. Normally when one reads something as simple as “The good four.—Honest towards ourselves and whoever else is a friend to us; brave towards the enemy; magnanimous towards the defeated; polite—always” (D 556), one does not simply read that honesty, bravery, magnanimity, and politeness are valuable but that these are valuable for all people of all times. As we saw in
chapter two, when reading Nietzsche we should infer that the values Nietzsche champions are *his* values, not an attempt of his to prescribe these values to readers. The virtues and values he expressed are intimately connected to his drives and helped him affirm life. Naturally, others have different drives that require different virtues from those Nietzsche endorsed. While Nietzsche’s virtues have been healthy for *him*, since they accord with *his* conception of the good life, borrowing his virtues does not guarantee health for any other individual. “The popular medical formulation of morality that goes back to Ariston of Chios, ‘virtue is the health of the soul,’ would have to be changed to become useful, at least to read: ‘*your* virtue is the health of *your* soul.’ For there is no health as such.” (GS 120) Virtues can be the health of the soul if one nurture’s one’s own virtues, but adopting virtues from others can be hazardous. Nietzsche believes in an order of rank between people, with the higher and lower ranks being in need of severely different virtues because of their different needs and abilities. For a lower type to adopt a higher type’s virtue, or vice versa, would be debilitating. Nietzsche writes,

> “What serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation must almost be poison for a very different and inferior type. The virtues of the common man might perhaps signify vices and weaknesses in a philosopher. […] There are books that have opposite values for soul and health, depending on whether the lower soul, the lower vitality, or the higher and more vigorous ones turn to them: in the former case, these books are dangerous and lead to crumbling and disintegration […] Books for all the world are always foul-smelling books: the smell of small people clings to them.” (BGE 30)

Surely Nietzsche thinks his books smell of roses. If he speaks on virtue it is surely not for all, but for those select few “higher types” that could benefit from his writing. Even then, his words on
virtue would not be meant to persuade readers into adopting Nietzsche’s virtues but to show an example of one who had forged his own ideal. The higher types would still need to forge their own ideal, not copy his. For the masses to read his books and attempt to emulate his values would be a catastrophe to Nietzsche. To attempt virtues that are beyond their abilities and contrary to their needs would only serve as poison to das folk. Solomon’s use of Nietzsche is contrary to this, he interprets Nietzsche as specifically advocating the adoption of his virtues “He [Nietzsche] insisted that the philosopher must be an ‘example,’ and so a good portion of this book is devoted to understanding both this connection and the concrete virtues that Nietzsche wrote about in his works, not out of detached interest but in order to persuade us to adopt and pursue them.” I suggest that the universal ‘us’ used by Solomon makes his book smell foul. Nietzsche’s philosophy was personal, he did see philosophy as a covert memoir, but this does not also mean that this memoir is also a “how-to-guide.” For Nietzsche, to sketch out a philosophy is to write a memoir of what ideas have worked for that individual.

“Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir […] In the philosopher […] there is nothing whatever that is impersonal; and above all, his morality bears decided and decisive witness to who he is—that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other.” (BGE 6)

Each person’s philosophy shows if she is a higher or lower type, what morality worked for her, what drives were most prominent for her. Most moral philosophies have been both memoirs and “how-to-guides.” In these moral memoirs the writer gives imperatives of how to follow their

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80 LN, p. 11.
morality, how to justify certain acts and character traits; however, the most action guiding imperative Nietzsche ever dictates is the purposefully, extraordinarily vague “What does your conscience say?—‘You shall become the person you are.” (GS 270) Nietzsche’s famous words state “become the person you are,” not become Nietzsche, not become your role-model, and certainly not to become anyone else’s ideal. Nietzsche’s philosophy may have been a memoir but it is dubious that he wanted the values of his life universalized to the masses. To claim that others should adopt one’s morality, one’s own memoir is a position of hubris even beyond Nietzsche.

“Let us consider finally what naivety it is to say ‘man ought to be thus and thus!’

Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the luxuriance of a prodigal play and change of forms: and does some pitiful journeyman moralist say at the sight of it:

‘No! man ought to be different’?... He even knows how man ought to be, this bigoted wretch; he paints himself on the wall and says ‘ecce homo’!81” (TI “Morality as Anti-Nature” 6)

This “wealth of types” is to be celebrated, not constrained. Each type of person is so unique as to afford her own differing virtues and values that adopting one form of virtue or value would only stagnate humanity. To claim that you are the single type that the rest of humanity should mimic can only be an arrogant attack on humanity. While one can imagine Nietzsche applauding this attack as a grab for power, to call this anything more than a grab for power would be misleading. While he doesn’t applaud it, Nietzsche does show the myopic selfishness required to universalize one’s own judgments,

81 “Behold the man!”
“it is selfish to experience one’s own judgment as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty, and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own, your very own— for that could never be somebody else’s and much less that of all, all!” (GS 335)

If a person has not attempted creating their own ideal, then it is easy to believe that all should conform to a single ideal. To believe this, that one’s morality should be the morality for all to follow, is not only selfish but petty and blind. It shows a lack of self-discovery and because of this an inability to understand the unique needs and capacities of others. Surely with this foresight Nietzsche would avoid universalizing his own value judgments to others.

If one reads Nietzsche under this lens, one sees Nietzsche’s value statements not as universal standards but both as what worked for Nietzsche and as an example for readers. This example is not meant to lead readers into adopting Nietzsche’s values but to show how one individual has separated from herd morality and is discovering what values and virtues work for him. Famously Zarathustra proclaimed “‘This – it turns out – is my way – where is yours?’ That is how I answer those who asked me ‘the way.’ The way after all – it does not exist!” (Z, “On the Spirit of Gravity” 156) Readers are not meant to follow Zarathustra’s (or Nietzsche’s) way but to learn by his example to forge their own paths. To follow Nietzsche’s way, to universalize his values and virtues, is indicative of a slave morality rather than the individual morality that Nietzsche admires.

Solomon does recognize some amount of Nietzschean individualism, “But if each of us must find his or her own way, that would mean producing a portrait, or a number of portraits, for each of us, individually, differing from culture to culture, social class to social class, person to
To somewhat acknowledge Nietzsche’s individualism, Solomon paints his idea of virtue as allowing for each person to participate in each virtue by differing degrees. Contrary to Nietzsche’s extreme individualism, though, Solomon advocates for a set tablet of virtues that all should attempt to foster. These virtues-for-all are fundamentally anti-Nietzschean. Solomon’s list of twenty-three virtues, is antithetical to one of the most prominent ideas voiced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—that each individual must forge her own virtues and discover her own values from her own abilities, drives, and challenges. To adopt another person’s virtues or values is to fall back into herd-type morality. Foreseeing this problem, Solomon recognizes Nietzsche’s urge for individualism.

“But Nietzsche insists that each of us must find our own way, ‘become who [each of us individually] is.’ This theme permeates *Zarathustra*: ‘If you would go high, use your own legs.’ (Z, “On the Higher Man”, 236) Nietzsche even suggests (again in *Zarathustra*) that every virtue is unique, and even by being named it thereby becomes something *common*. That would make the very idea of a general account of the virtues, especially the Nietzschean virtues, impossible.”

If Nietzsche’s overt passages deny the universality required of virtue ethics, then so much the worse for a Nietzschean account of virtue ethics. After stating this problem with a Nietzschean virtue ethic, Solomon does not cite counter evidence, create an argument against it, nor attempt to shape his version of a Nietzschean virtue ethic in a way that allows for this kind of individualism. Instead he simply states “But this, of course, is foolish, another Nietzsche hyperbole.”

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82 LN, p. 140
83 LN, p. 139
84 LN, p. 139
passages against universal virtues does little justice to the problem that Solomon faces in attempting to fit Nietzsche into a virtue ethic. If this form of individualism was simply mentioned by Nietzsche in a single passage or it could be shown to be ironic, then this simple refutation may suffice. However, as Solomon says, the idea of individually discovered values “permeates” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and can be found throughout Nietzsche’s middle and late corpus. For example, in referencing the possible danger of a standard morality Nietzsche writes,

“I do not wish to promote any morality, but to those who do I give this advice: If you wish to deprive the best things and states of all honor and worth, then go on talking about them as you have been doing. Place them at the head of your morality and talk from morning to night of the happiness of virtue, the composure of the soul, of justice and immanent retribution. The way you are going about it, all these good things will eventually have popularity and the clamor of the streets on their side; but at the same time all the gold that was on them will have been worn off by so much handling, and all the gold inside will have turned to lead. Truly, you are master of alchemy in reverse: the devaluation of what is most valuable.”(GS 292)

Nietzsche did not write extensively on his favored virtues85 because making them common only threatened the values that he associated with them. While a personal morality can enhance an individual’s life, values that are democratized can lose their luster. For example, if Nietzsche values friendship, it is for very specific and personal reasons. He may value it because good friendships can drive one to new ambitious heights. If Nietzsche preached this virtue to the masses, it can be easily imagined that they will value it for

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85 Although he does give two short lists of virtues (D 556 & BGE 284)
completely different reasons, such as for the pleasure friendship provides them. Dragging
the virtues one cherishes most into the reach of others will only devalue these virtues, in
Nietzsche’s opinion. However worthwhile forging your own morality may be, spreading
your values, making the populace’s value homogenous, only endangers the values that
motivate your morality. The individual nature of morality is a central aspect of morality for
Nietzsche. This individualism not only influences what Nietzsche finds valuable but, more
importantly, it forms the basis of his critique of ethics. The universalization of morality
that was common among his contemporaries ignored the rank and difference between
people. Instead they treat all people the same, under a single, impersonal ethic. The belief
in the individuality of morality and the separate ranks of people is unavoidable in
Nietzsche’s work:

“what is fair for one cannot by any means for that reason alone also be fair for
others; that the demand of one morality for all is detrimental for the higher men; in
short, that there is an order of rank between man and man, hence also between
morality and morality.” (BGE 228)

Nietzsche, the very icon of fierce independence, could not advocate for a universalized
ethic such as the one Solomon presents. The presentation of twenty-three virtues that
Solomon prescribes to all ignores this core part of Nietzsche’s work. This is an obstacle for
Solomon or anyone who would claim that Nietzsche is a virtue ethicist. As long as virtue
ethics require universalized virtues, I believe Nietzsche is unable to be a virtue ethicist.
Relevant Bibliography


