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NIETZSCHE'S SKEPTICISM OF AGENCY

An Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for Graduation with

Undergraduate Research Honors

Georgia State University

2012

by

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Date

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by

BEN LORENTZ

Under the Direction of Jessica N. Berry

ABSTRACT

Nietzsche's view of the self and will seems to culminate in a naturalistic account of human agency. If we understand Nietzsche as primarily a naturalist who thinks philosophy should more or less be modeled on the sciences whose investigations are restricted to empirical observation and whose explanations, like causal explanation, are natural (rather than supernatural), then ascribing a naturalistic account of human agency to Nietzsche is appropriate. However, I argue that attributing a naturalistic account of agency, or any account of agency to Nietzsche, misunderstands Nietzsche's skepticism. I attempt to demonstrate the primacy of Nietzsche's skepticism by showing how "his" naturalistic "account" of agency is best understood as an instrument in the service of his purely critical and deflationary project. To show the instrumental character of his "account," I show how the account is used to oppose traditional notions of agency without itself becoming *Nietzsche's theory* of agency.

INDEX WORDS: Nietzsche, Skepticism, Agency, Action, Causation

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Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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I. Introduction

A common intuition we have about ourselves is that we are actively engaged in the world, doing this or that under our own direction. We do not feel that we are merely passive vehicles through which events occur. Rather, we feel we have some degree of control over both what occurs in us and how we act. We intuit, then, that we are free actors or autonomous agents. Another common intuition is that humans and human actions are part of the “natural order.” We are natural creatures whose actions are natural phenomena. So it seems that human actions are explainable in the same “natural” or causal terms as are other natural phenomena, like other animals’ behaviors. At first blush, explaining action in naturalistic, causal terms appears to conflict with our first intuition, that we are creatures who *direct* our own action according to our own conscious will. Causal explanations of action seem to reduce us to mere vehicles within which events occur. But before we can address the problem of whether we are free agents, we need to get clear on the more basic idea of action and how it is that we seem to be the kind of creatures that act.

What is action? What sort of creature must I be to act? What is this “I” and how does it cause action? Action is *making happen* instead of a *happening to*, and we typically think that we behave in this or that way by *willing* ourselves to behave in this or that way. But what is the will and how does willing work? These questions and answers invoke three notions that are key to any explanation of human agency: the self, the will, and causation. When combined, they appear to result in human action: the self causes action by actuating the will. It is imperative for understanding human agency, then, that we understand these three notions.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a nineteenth-century German philosopher, thought it necessary to investigate morality and, by extension, agency. His overarching project was to “undermine our *faith in morality*” (D P 2)¹. An enterprise attacking morality might seem strange, but Nietzsche thought it was worth asking what the effects of morality, and specifically Christian or selfless morality, have on Western culture and on individuals, and whether that effect is healthy and promotes human flourishing. After all, we may be dogmatically assenting to values, laboring under the false belief that selfless morality is good for us; if made aware of the ill effects of selfless morality, we may think better of living according to its values. In addition, moralities that hold people responsible for their actions seem to depend upon questionable notions like a metaphysically free will and, with Christian morality, an immaterial soul. Investigation into selfless morality, then, looks worthwhile, perhaps even necessary. This project is specifically important for the issue of agency because if it turns out that we do not understand human action, then it is rash to think of ourselves as moral agents whose actions are morally evaluable. So an attack on agency is indirectly an attack on the coherence of Christian morality, assuming that morality should be something with which we can act in accordance. As William K. Frankena has written, “Morality is made from man, not man for morality” (1973: 116).

Nietzsche, I claim, mounts an attack on agency as part of his attempt to undermine our faith in morality for the sake of health. He attacks traditional notions of agency by attempting to deflate those traditional. This deflationary project centers on critiquing and opposing traditional conceptions of the self, the will, and causation. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche attacks

¹ Nietzsche’s texts will be cited as follows: BGE refers to *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Kaufmann, 1989); D refers to *Daybreak* (New York: Hollingdale, 2009); EH refers to *Ecce Homo* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Kaufmann, 1989); HH refers to *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (New York: Hollingdale, 2009); GS refers to *The Gay Science* (New York: Del Caro, 2001); GM refers to *On The Genealogy of Morals* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Kaufmann, 1989); TI refers to *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Kaufmann, 1976).

the idea that the self is a thing or substance when he writes that “there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind doing [...] ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (GM I 13). In *Twilight of the Idols* he attacks the will and the self: “The will no longer moves anything, hence does not explain anything [...]. And as for the *ego*! That has become a fable, a fiction, a play on words: it has altogether ceased to think, feel, or will” (TI “Four Errors” 3). As for causation, Nietzsche doubts that we can fully understand it: “a certain thing always succeeds another certain thing—this we *call*, when we perceive it and want to call it something, cause and effect—we fools! As though we had here understood something or other, or could understand it” (D 121).

Nietzsche’s deflationary project is primarily aimed at opposing prevalent dogmatic conceptions of agency that purport to offer the “final answer” on agency. One way to deflate dogma is through critique. Another way is to oppose the dogma with a viable alternative account of agency. However, Nietzsche is not interested in replacing one dogma with another, so his “alternative account” should not be understood as an account that attempts to explain agency fully or, for that matter, at all. Rather, Nietzsche explicitly encourages *further inquiry* into his “account” of agency,² and as we will see, he even undermines his own “account” of agency by taking a skeptical stance towards causation which renders inconsistent any interpretation that ascribes to Nietzsche an explanation of agency.

I claim that Nietzsche’s project is best understood as being fundamentally *skeptical*, not in the sense that he *denies* that humans are agents or *believes it impossible* to explain human agency, but in the sense that he seeks throw the dogmatist’s beliefs off balance by opposing their

² Nietzsche writes that, “the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as ‘mortal soul,’ and ‘soul of subjective multiplicity,’ and ‘soul as social structure of the drives and affects,’ want henceforth to have citizens’ rights in science” (BGE 12). An account of the self that aims at having ‘citizens rights in science’ is an account that leaves itself open to, and explicitly calls for, further investigation.

accounts of agency with other accounts while *suspending judgment* on the matter. When one suspends judgment, one does not commit to a position and so does not advocate for one account or another. By opposing the dogmatist's arguments with equally good arguments, the skeptic finds that suspension of judgment is the most reasonable conclusion and further investigation into the matter is needed. Unlike the skeptic, we seem to crave certainty and to think that the purpose of inquiry is to arrive at certainty in our beliefs. We think that reaching certainty in our beliefs present us with a permanent comfortable vacation free from the troubles and worries of doubt and further investigation. Charles Sanders Pierce expresses this sentiment: "Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves" (2011: 10). Where doubt is like an itch that "stimulates inquiry until it is destroyed" by belief (thereby making further inquiry unnecessary), belief is a "calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid" (2011: 10). Sextus Empiricus in *Outlines of Scepticism* echoes Pierce's sentiment: "Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil" (OS I 12).³ But the skeptic reports that "because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspend judgment and afterwards to tranquility," where "tranquility" is perhaps better understood as mental health (OS I 7). However, the skeptic does not resign herself to the possibility of knowledge, she only realizes that because of the equipollence of arguments, she needs to continue to investigate a particular issue.

My primary aim in this paper is to show that (1) Nietzsche attempts to deflate traditional views of agency, (2) that his "drive psychology," which offers an account of agency, cannot in

³ "OS" refers to *Outlines of Scepticism* (New York: Annas, 2000).

fact be understood as *Nietzsche's* explanation of agency, in the way that many commentators have suggested, and (3) that (1) and (2) make sense when we understand Nietzsche as a skeptic who suspends judgment on the issue of agency for the sake of health while using his drive-psychology as an “alternative theory” to oppose other accounts of agency which incites further investigation. My second claim that Nietzsche’s drive psychology offers an account of agency and is used to oppose other accounts of agency, but is not an account that is appropriately ascribed to Nietzsche as his view of agency, may seem like an odd claim. What I aim to show is that understanding Nietzsche as primarily a skeptic allows Nietzsche’s drive psychology to function as a tool for his deflationary project. And understanding Nietzsche’s drive psychology (in a loose sense) as a tool but not a theory Nietzsche commits himself to avoids a major problem of dealing with Nietzsche’s skepticism of causation on the one hand, and on the other hand, a causalism account of agency. To be sure, then, it is important to keep in mind the *function* of the drive psychology. I am claiming that while the drive psychology does offer an account of agency, it is *not Nietzsche's theory of agency* and he does not use it as a theory that explains human action; rather, it functions as a *tool* that opposes the force of other accounts of agency with equal force, thereby bringing about suspension of judgment.⁴

II. Agency

There are three prevalent ways of explaining agency that I will briefly recount here. First is what I will call “intentionalism,” which is the view that action is to be understood in terms of reasons and intentions. One acts *intentionally* when one acts for some *reason*, and the intent paired with the reason *explains* the action. For example, Jane volunteering at the hospital is

⁴ I owe a great deal to Jessica Berry whose skeptical reading of Nietzsche is argued for in her book *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition* (2011).

explained by her reason that she wants or intends to help those who are sick. Intentionalism, then, implicitly relies upon the claim that consciousness directs or wills action and seems to identify the self with the mind or consciousness. The second view of agency, “agent-causation,” maintains that an agent is the source of his action. The strong version of this view is that the agent, as a self-sufficient substance, causes action. In that case, the agent is *not affected* by some antecedent cause but is the only cause of action. The weak version of this view is that the agent, as a self-sufficient substance, has the *capacity* to cause actions independent of external causal factors and is the *primary* cause of action, but is in many cases affected by external causal factors.⁵ Undermining notions of the self and the will, then, goes a long way toward problematizing our prevalent ways of explaining human action. However, it does not undercut all explanations. I will quickly highlight the third explanation of agency, “event-causation,” that does not explicitly rely on the self as a self-sufficient substance or the will as a faculty.

According to event-causation, the “agent” is merely the “channel” or “vehicle” for the events (like neuronal behavior) that cause action. Event-causation is a naturalistic account of action, meaning that action is explained in terms of material objects and so called “natural” forces like causation. Event-causal explanations are causally reductive accounts of action. For instance, according to the event-causalist, agent-causation is causally reducible to physical events within the person since action that “the agent” causes is really caused by, for instance, neuronal behavior.⁶ Explaining action in terms of events does not *prima facie* rely on the notion of the self as a single self-sufficient substance, since the self could simply be the amalgamation

⁵ On the face of it, intentionalism and agent-causation are compatible explanations of agency. Both accounts claim that the agent causes action. The primary difference is that intentionalism explains action as a process of means-ends reasoning where the agent acts for the sake of some end. Agent-causation does not necessarily commit itself to explaining action in terms of means-ends reasoning.

⁶ This claim, however, is not that the self is ontologically reducible to, for instance, her neuronal behavior but only that action emitting from the self is causally reducible to neuronal behavior. That is, event-causation does not necessarily entail that the self is nothing more than a brain.

of neuronal behavior and various brain states explained by antecedent causes. But if causation lacks explanatory power, which is in some sense what Nietzsche thinks, it becomes increasingly difficult to explain human action.

III. *Daybreak* 129

We begin by looking at Nietzsche's attack intentionalism, which will set the scene for and raise questions about the "elements" of agency (the self, the will, and causation). In *Daybreak* 129, Nietzsche raises several problems for a version of intentionalism according to which before we act, we consider multiple actions and their possible outcomes, and then choose the action that we believe will result in the best outcome. But Nietzsche points out that,

before reaching this conclusion, we often honestly torment ourselves on account of the great difficulty of divining what the consequences will be [...]. Indeed, to come to the worst difficulty: all the consequences, so hard to determine individually, now have to be weighed against one another on the *same* scales, but [...] we lack the scales and the weights for this casuistry of advantage. (D 129)

When we "determine" the outcomes of various acts, Nietzsche claims that we have "divined" these outcomes, or guessed that, for example, when we ϕ , some state of affairs A will be the result. Certainty about the outcome of some actions is simply not available to us. But more significantly, this view faces the problem of the criterion. Selecting the most desirable outcome assumes that we can *compare* these consequences. So we need the "scales" or criteria to accurately determine the most desirable outcome and we need a clear hierarchy of goals that determines the criteria for selection. Nietzsche claims that, even if we can determine the consequences of our actions, we have no *foundational* criteria to which to appeal to determine the best outcome. A set of criteria P is justified only if there is a further set of criteria Q. But the criteria in set Q are legitimate only in virtue of some further set of criteria R. So there is an

infinite regress unless there is some *foundational* criterion that we can appeal to. But there is no incontrovertible maxim upon which a set of criteria can be constructed because every maxim contains a value judgment. And since we cannot be absolutely certain about our judgments, we cannot establish a foundational maxim or criterion upon which we can determine the best outcome.

After objecting to intentionalism, Nietzsche explains that the view is predicated upon a confusion that mistakes the *act of deliberation* for a *conflict of inclinations or drives*. So Nietzsche uses his drive psychology to oppose the Intentionalist view of action:

at the moment when we finally act, our action is often enough determined by a different species of motives than the species here under discussion [...]. *Probably* a struggle takes place between these [motives] as well, a battling to and fro, a rising and falling of the scales [...]. I have calculated the consequences and the outcomes and in doing so have set *one* very essential motive in the battle-line—but I have not set up this battle-line itself, nor can I even see it: the struggle itself is hidden from me, and likewise the victory as the victory [...]. *[We] are all accustomed to exclude* all these unconscious processes from the accounting and to reflect on the preparation for an act only to the extent that it is conscious: and we thus confuse conflict of motives with comparison of the possible consequences of different action—a confusion itself very rich in consequences and one highly fateful for the evolution of morality! (D 129)

Nietzsche's overarching point is that we believe we have a "conflict of consequences," i.e., that we deliberate both on what action will produce what outcome and what consequence is most desirable. But "*probably*," Nietzsche writes, there is an unconscious struggle among motives, or "drives,"⁷ and this struggle is mistaken for deliberation. Nietzsche, writing that "probably" P is the case, suggests that he is not dogmatically asserting what is the case. Rather, he is speculating in a way that is open to inquiry for the sake of opposing dogmatic points of view. This passage

⁷ This concept of a drive is *very* important in Nietzsche's thought about action, the mind, and psychology. Also, his discussions about the self, the will, and causation often focus on our drives, and for that reason, I will return to the notion of the drives and explain it in more detail. But for now, it will suffice to understand drives as being synonymous with *motives* for action.

also gives us insight into Nietzsche's method: he raises an objection and then offers a viable alternative account. However, he couches this alternative account in hypothetical language to indicate that he is not interested in replacing one dogma for another.

The view Nietzsche advances hypothetically, then, is that there is a range of different drives competing for selection. These drives, by definition, motivate actions by influencing the mind to generate certain thoughts, which is why "a thought comes when 'it' wishes, and not when 'I' wish" (BGE 17). The musician's impulse to create music, for instance, causes her to think about creating music. Likewise the drug addict's impulse to use drugs causes him to think about using drugs.

Nietzsche ends *Daybreak* 129 by offhandedly remarking that our having taken a conflict among unconscious motives for a comparison of consequences was "highly fateful" for "the evolution of morality" (D 129). It is not immediately clear what Nietzsche means by that last remark, but if we look to the following aphorism, *Daybreak* 130, we find that Nietzsche is leveling the same objection as the first two objections I described above:

Perhaps our acts of will and our purposes are nothing but just such throws [of dice]—and we are only too limited and too vain to comprehend our extreme limitedness: which consists in the fact that we ourselves shake the dice-box with iron hands, that we ourselves in our most intentional actions do no more than play the game of necessity. Perhaps! (D 130)⁸

If it is the case that the motives for our actions, and the ideas of the actions themselves are not generated consciously, and that we often have no way of knowing the consequences of our actions, then even "in our most intentional acts," we, as unified conscious selves, have little to contribute to what actions we carry out. But if we have confused this process, and through our

⁸ It is worth pointing out that Nietzsche begins and ends this remark with "perhaps." Hence, Nietzsche is not committing himself to the fatalistic view. Brian Leiter (2002, 61) uses this very passage to support his fatalistic reading of Nietzsche but does not take account of Nietzsche's use of "perhaps." See Leiter (2002, 81-104) for his treatment of Nietzsche on agency and fatalism.

confusion, we now take ourselves to be the primary contributors to our actions, then we seem to make ourselves responsible for our actions. However, this implication hinges upon what both the self and the will are.

The self is perhaps best thought of as the *subject* of thoughts, feelings, and experiences that persists as the same *substance* throughout time. So the self is taken to be the essential thing that you are, which remains constant or underlies the barrage of mental and physical changes. It is a matter of debate whether this substance is non-material (often thought of as consciousness or as a soul) or material (merely the brain). Throughout most of the history of modern philosophy, philosophers have followed Descartes in thinking of the self as a distinct substance that is known with absolute certainty.

IV. The Self

Nietzsche writes that we “conceive and misconceive [of] all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a ‘subject’” (GM I 13). Nietzsche invites us to observe our experience of lightning. When we see lightning, we also see a flash, and we ordinarily say that the lightning caused the flash. Behind the event of the flash, then, we posit an existing *thing*, a substratum, that causes the event (the lightning). But Nietzsche claims that “there is no ‘being’ behind [the] doing, effecting, becoming: ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (GM I 13). This point can be understood in two ways. First, we might say there simply is nothing behind events; events simply occur one after another in a radical flux of becoming. This interpretation must be dismissed because if everything is becoming, there is nothing that can be, and so nothing that can be true. But if nothing can be true, this claim cannot be true and the claim refutes itself. The preferable interpretation is that there is no self that can

cause events uninfluenced or uncaused by other substances. The “doer” in each case is also a deed, an effect of some prior cause.

If the self were self-sufficient, it would be its own cause, i.e., the cause that causes itself to act, not the cause of its being or existence. So if the self were identified with consciousness, deliberation would be uninfluenced by our inclinations and affects; one would only deliberate in accordance with oneself. Hence the self would cause itself to select actions. Nietzsche rejects this view because the *causa sui* “is something fundamentally absurd” and is “the best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far, it is a sort of rape and perversion of logic” (BGE 15, 21). Nietzsche thinks the idea that the self can detach itself from or stave off influences by the inclinations and affects is ridiculous. To put it candidly, when you have not eaten anything for two days, your hunger will affect your decisions and actions, which suggests that our inclinations and affections are always in some way influencing our decisions.

Nietzsche also opposes the idea that decisions are made by the self. The self is not the impetus for decisions; rather, an unknown motive seems to cause one decision or another: “I shall never tire of emphasizing a small terse fact, which these superstitious minds hate to concede—namely, that a thought comes when ‘it’ wishes and not when ‘I’ wish [...] *It* thinks; but that this ‘it’ is precisely the famous old ‘ego’ is, to put it mildly, only a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an ‘immediate certainty’” as Descartes claimed (BGE 17). My thoughts seem to occur at random, but not because I want them to occur or because I knowingly generate the thoughts. And identifying the self with thinking is simply an unfounded assumption that we have no reason to believe. Hence we seem to have reasons not to accept the view that the self is a self-sufficient thought-producing substance.

Elsewhere, Nietzsche writes that, “the belief in ‘substance,’ in ‘matter,’ in the earth-residuum and particle-atom: it is the greatest triumph over the sense that has been gained on earth so far” (BGE 12). It seems Nietzsche is making the Humean point that we never observe a substance or substratum lying beneath or behind an object. We only observe the object itself so that it is a “triumph over the senses” to posit some further thing, as it were, “beyond” the object. However, *Nietzsche does not thereby reject the notion of a substance or the self*, having no reason to assent to a view is not grounds for *rejecting* that view. Rather, having no reason to assent to a view calls for the suspension of judgment and further inquiry into the matter, which is exactly the path Nietzsche takes:

Between ourselves, it is *not at all necessary* to get rid of ‘the soul’ at the same time, and to renounce one of the most ancient and venerable hypotheses—as happens frequently to clumsy naturalists who can hardly touch ‘the soul’ without immediately losing it. But the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as ‘mortal soul,’ and ‘soul as subjective multiplicity,’ and ‘soul as social structure of the drives and affects,’ want henceforth to have *citizens’ rights in science* (BGE 12, emphasis added).

The self as a hierarchy of drives and affects is precisely what Nietzsche investigates and consequently, what he uses to oppose the “ancient and venerable” self-hypothesis. But clearly, Nietzsche does not reject this hypothesis since he claims that it is “not at all necessary” to reject the view. This move might seem a bit strange at first blush, but if we understand Nietzsche as a skeptic who does not want to replace one dogma with another, then we can understand Nietzsche as offering an alternative view of the self for the sake of opposing those who take the self to be a self-sufficient substratum like a soul.

It is significant that Nietzsche intends for his alternative view of the self to have “citizens’ rights in science” (BGE 12). That means that Nietzsche wants the self to be

empirically observable. Adopting a view of the self where the self is empirically observable and thus available for biological and psychological inquiry is significant because Nietzsche claims that psychology ought to be “recognized again as the queen of the sciences, for whose service and preparation the other sciences exist. For psychology is now again the path to the fundamental problems” (BGE 23). But what is the aim of psychology such that it is the way towards the “fundamental problems”? The answer seems fairly clear: if psychology is the way towards the fundamental problems, and the primary problem for psychology is mental health, then the fundamental problem is health, especially mental health. And this comes as no surprise since Nietzsche is consistently concerned over issues of health and human flourishing.⁹ But what is significant is that we have a case in point that Nietzsche is encouraging further investigation rather than settling on one dogma or another, which is why Nietzsche writes that, “I approve of any form of skepticism to which I can reply, ‘Let’s try it!’ But I want to hear nothing more about all the things and questions that don’t admit to experiment” (GS 51).

Nietzsche’s alternative view of the self is, as already noted, a “social structure of drives and affects” (BGE 12). I think that the “social structure” or “commonwealth” language is misleading because it encourages an understanding of drives as conscious agents. I will explain that in more detail, but first we need to get clear on Nietzschean drives. I think Paul Katsafanas is basically correct in defining drives as “dispositions that induce affective orientations in the agent” (forthcoming b, 10). Drives include both inclinations (e.g., the sex drive or the inclination to eat) and dispositions (e.g., the overall cheerful or pessimistic outlook one has on life). There is much debate in the literature over the nature of the influence of drives on action. On the one

⁹ GS P 2: “A psychologist knows few questions as attractive as that concerning the relation between health and philosophy.” GM III 14: “The sick represent the greatest danger for the healthy; it is *not* the strongest but the weakest who spell disaster for the strong.” EH “Wise” 2: “I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again.” See also, HH I P 4, 5; II P 2, 356, 361; D P 2; GS P, 19, 382; BGE 200; GM P 3. For an excellent discussion on the topic of Nietzsche on skepticism and health, see Berry (2011, 133-173).

hand, drives are said to cause action (e.g., the drive for comfort causes you to accept certain beliefs that reinforce familiar beliefs). On the other hand, drives are purported to cause affects that bring us to the horizon of action by making us aware of salient features in the world (e.g., my drive to violence induces an angry disposition that makes visible the vexing aspects of a child playing in the supermarket, which leads me to act in an angry or violent way). Where the first view closes off the possibility of conscious involvement in action production, the second view leaves open this possibility. But I see no reason to favor one view over the other since the first view seems to explain “automatic” actions, like “fight or flight” responses, and the second view explains cases where, despite a particular disposition, a person consciously acts against this disposition. Both views, however, fall victim to Nietzsche’s skepticism about causation, which I will discuss later in the paper.

The “governing principle” of drives is power. The drive that is the strongest at any given moment is drive that causes action. But this claim runs counter to the more natural interpretation, the “homunculus view,” that some authority governs the social structure where the strongest drives commands the other drives. Clark and Dudrick hold this homunculus view because, as they say:

When one acts on one’s values rather than one’s momentary desires, the commands of some drives(s) counteract and overcome the mere physiological strength of the drives. In such a case, the drives are not simply exerting brute causal strength (as they do when a person is in a state of indecision); rather, on Nietzsche’s account, one of the drives is exerting *political* authority. (2012: 198)

But this interpretation appears to entail that drives are conscious agents with the ability to recognize and respect the authority of the commanding drive. Clark and Dudrick claim that is not the case since groups of animals, like chimpanzees and wolves, operate under “political authority,” but that this “does not imply that the animals in question *take themselves* to form a

political order; their ‘conscious motives and intentions’ need not concern their political standing” (2012: 199). So, Clark and Dudrick claim, “in saying that the drives form a political order, then, Nietzsche need not take them to be *conscious* of their political situation—he need not take them to be conscious *at all*” (2012: 199). On the face of it, this seems to work, however, there is no theoretical advantage to the homunculus view because if we accept it, then *we need to explain how the drives can recognize and obey authority without being conscious*. And Clark and Dudrick have simply shown *that* drives can recognize and obey authority without being conscious, but not *how* this is the case. To avoid introducing this unnecessary problem, we can understand the drives as merely a *collection* of drives that operate according to power and not authority.

V. The Will

The traditional conception of the will is that the will is a single faculty that causes action. So the act of willing is essentially an activity. Traditional views of agency like intentionalism and agent-causation maintain that the agent *consciously directs* willing by actuating the will. If consciousness is identified as the self as a self-sufficient thing, then it follows that, on the traditional view, the self actuates the will. We have already seen that Nietzsche thinks there is no reason to assent to the view that consciousness is identical to the self or that the self as a self-sufficient substance produces thoughts. Likewise, Nietzsche claims that the will is “a unit only as a word” so that “today we know it is just a word” (BGE 19; TI “Reason” 5). Nietzsche is not rejecting the will, but he does think that the traditional conception of the will as a single faculty is concealing our complex experience of willing: “willing *seems* to me to be above all something *complicated*” (BGE 19, first emphasis added). Far from being a single unit or faculty, Nietzsche

thinks the will is a diverse and distinguishable set of parts that operate (more or less) in harmony to cause action. Hence the will as a single faculty “no longer moves anything, does not explain anything either” (TI “Four Errors” 3).

In Nietzsche’s description of the experience of willing, it appears that the drives and affects are at the helm of the process of willing. According to Nietzsche, there seems to be three parts that work together in the act of willing: first, there is a “plurality of sensations” felt when willing occurs; second, “in every act of the will there is a ruling thought;” third, willing involves “the affect of command” and the obedience of the other affects because “all willing [...] is absolutely a question of commanding an obeying, on the basis, [...] of a social structure composed of many ‘souls’” (BGE 19). The basis for willing, then, is a collection of drives and affects. Without the drive to create art, for instance, the artist would not paint. This point reinforces the claim that deliberation does not occur independently of the influence of the drives and affects. However, Nietzsche also claims that thinking is an ingredient of willing. But the “self” is not at the seat of consciousness generating thoughts; rather, the “intellect is only the blind instrument of *another drive* [...]. While ‘we’ believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive *which is complaining about another*” (D 109). Aside from squaring nicely with Nietzsche’s alternative account of the self, the idea seems to be that a dominating drive causes the mind to generate a thought that indicates the drive’s “need,”¹⁰ which is why “a thought comes when ‘it’ wishes, and not when ‘I’ wish” (BGE 17). For example, the drive to create causes the mind to generate a thought about painting a portrait of a friend. When the mind is caused by a dominant drive to generate this “ruling thought,” i.e., the thought that leads to action, particular sensations are produced that carry out the act, namely a “*towards which*” and an “*away from which*,” along with muscular sensations. For example, when

¹⁰ I am not claiming that drives generate thoughts; rather, drives stimulate the mind and the mind generates thought.

I leave the computer to walk the dog, I feel a compulsion or sensation that leads me to walk the dog and another sensation that repels me from the computer. And these sensations are experienced in every act. The act is successfully carried out only if all the parts (arms, legs, etc.) “obey” or function properly. If the nervous system is not functioning properly, for instance, the necessary sensations for movement are not produced or do not register.

The view of agency on the table is that the most powerful drive causes the mind to generate a thought that actuates certain bodily movements. This view is essentially an event-causation view, and it can appropriately be ascribed to Nietzsche (as some commentators have done)¹¹ only if his view of causation is not taken into account. But his view of causation cannot be reconciled with the claim that Nietzsche has a view of agency; rather, Nietzsche is most appropriately thought of as a skeptic with regard to agency and his drive-psychology is best thought of as playing a crucial role in his critical project of opposing traditional, dogmatic views of the self, the will, and agency.

VI. Causation

Nietzsche writes that “cause and effect” is never observed; rather, what we observe is a constant conjunction between objects:

a certain thing always succeeds another thing—this we *call*, when we perceive it and want to call it something, cause and effect—we fools! As though we had here understood something or other, or *could understand it*” (D 121, second emphasis added).

Nietzsche’s criticism presupposes a representationalist view of the mind according to which our experience of the world is always mediated by our representations (or “pictures”) of it. So we do not have direct access to objects in the world but only our representations of them, hence, “we

¹¹ See Leiter (2002: 91-104) and Katsafanas (2012) and (forthcoming a).

have seen nothing but *pictures* of ‘cause and effects’! And it is precisely this *pictorialness* that makes impossible an insight into a more essential connection than that of mere succession” (D 121). Nietzsche is making the standard Humean point about causation that, on a representationalist theory of mind, we never observe necessary connections. All we observe is the succession of events: the cue ball strikes the red ball and the red ball moves away from the cue ball. *But causation itself is never observed*. It would be easy to read Nietzsche’s last remark, that our representational relation to the world “makes impossible an insight into” the world apart from its appearance, as saying that we cannot infer from our observation of successive events to a necessary connection between objects themselves since all we have to ground this inference is our representations of objects and not the objects themselves. This claim suggests that we cannot have knowledge about the external world. However, the conclusion that we cannot have knowledge about the external world only follows if we draw a distinction between the appearance and reality, which Nietzsche does not do (GS 354). All Nietzsche is claiming is that we do not observe causation and that because it is not something that is an apparent force in the world, we should suspend judgment on whether causation “really exists” in the world or not.

If we suspend judgment on the issue of causation, then causation is off the table as an explanatory force: “We call it ‘explanation,’ but ‘description’ is what distinguished us from older stages of knowledge and science. We are better at describing—we explain just as little as all our predecessors” (GS 112). When we invoke causation, we reify it, but “one should not wrongly reify ‘cause’ and ‘effect,’ as the natural scientists do [...] one should use ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ only as pure concepts, that is to say, as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation and communication—*not* for explanation” (BGE 21). But to understand why Nietzsche claims

causation should not be used to explain anything, we need to understand exactly what Nietzsche takes causation to be.

Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick are headed in the right direction when they claim that Nietzsche accepts a “Humean view” of causation according to which “laws of nature are nothing more than generalizations from particular matters of fact,” and these generalizations are “laws” in the sense that they most effectively capture the “facts” (2012: 91). The Humean view is contrasted with the “anti-Humean view,” which states that laws of nature are “relations among universals” that “entail the occurrence of these events because they *necessitate* them,” i.e., laws of nature *govern* events or *make* events obtain (2012: 91).¹² I agree with Clark and Dudrick that Nietzsche is best understood as accepting a version of the Humean view on laws of nature.

However, the view Clark and Dudrick have on offer is a bit off track and needs to be qualified.

Even if causation is invented to account for our experience of “facts,” or more modestly, of our *experience* of the constant conjunction between objects, it does not follow that laws of nature are *nothing more* than generalizations. To make that claim, we would need to accept Clark’s view that Nietzsche *rejects* the distinction between appearance and reality so that he can justifiably make inferences *from* what appears *to* what is the case because appearance and reality are identical. But Nietzsche makes it quite clear that he does not reject that appearance is distinct from reality: “Even less am I concerned with the opposition between ‘thing in itself’ and appearance: *for we ‘know’ far to little* to be entitled to *make* that distinction” (GS 354, first emphasis added). In a similar vein Nietzsche declares, “What is ‘appearance’ to me now! Certainly no the opposite of some essence—what could I say about any essence except name the predicate of its appearance” (GS 54). Clark writes that GS 54 is “the best explanation I can find in the published works” that explains the idea that the “thing-in-itself involves a contradiction in

¹² Clark and Dudrick are relying on Beebe’s (2000: 571) explanations of the Humean and anti-Humean views.

terms” and so is in part why she reads Nietzsche as rejecting the distinction between appearance and reality (Clark 1990: 100). That is so, according to Clark, because in GS 54, Nietzsche argues that

we have no way of conceiving of a thing’s essence except in terms of its appearance. If we can conceive of what something is only in terms of its possible appearance, we have no way of conceiving of it as it is in itself (1990: 100).

And Clark is exactly right, except that it does not follow that since we cannot conceive of an object distinct from its appearances, that the way the object appears to us is in fact the way it is. We simply do not know if our observations correspond to “reality” and we cannot make sense of the notion of a reality distinct from our observations. We can only conceive of reality as being what it appears to be to us. But it is rather immodest to claim that either ϕ is conceivable to humans or it does not exist. That is precisely why “we ‘know’ far too little to even be entitled to *make that distinction*” (GS 354).

But how is not making a distinction different from rejecting a distinction? Quite simply, if I do not make a distinction, no judgment is made and I do not commit myself to a position. I leave open the possibility that the distinction can be made, accepted, or rejected. But when I reject the distinction ϕ , then I justifiably do so on the grounds that I know that ϕ is not the case. Hence I have no grounds for rejecting ϕ if I know too little about it in the first place. *And not making a commitment on ϕ —a quintessentially skeptical move—is clearly not the same as rejecting ϕ .* So we can reject Clark and Dudrick’s claim that Nietzsche rejects the distinction between appearance and reality, and we can also avoid Clark and Dudrick’s version of the Humean view according to which the laws of nature *just are* the generalizations of our experience construed in economical formulations. This version of the Humean view is propped up by the claim that what appears to us is in fact the case.

Nietzsche's modification of the Humean view is that laws of nature are generalizations of constant experiences that best piece together those constant experiences. However, it does not follow that laws of nature are "nothing more" than these generalizations, since they might indeed correspond to laws of nature in the anti-Humean sense. But we simply know far too little to make a judgment one way or the other on that matter. What Nietzsche does not say in his warning about laws of nature is telling in this regard: "let us beware of saying there are laws in nature" (GS 109). He does not end the warning with, "because there are no laws *in* nature" or "because laws *just are* human inventions," which would in fact support the Clark and Dudrick reading.

Given the Nietzschean modification of the Humean view, why does Nietzsche think that causation does not explain anything or help us understand anything? It is important to realize that the Humean view of causation is that causation is a concept developed out of generalizing our experience, but of course, we never observe causation itself, only a succession of events. Causation is an economical and pragmatic concept intended to capture the constant conjunction of events, but we have no reason to think that our concept of causation corresponds with anything in the world. But, again, that does not mean that our concept of causation does not correspond with anything in the world. And not knowing whether the mechanism we want to use as an *explicans* exists, it ought to be used "for the purpose of designation and communication—*not* for explanation" (BGE 21). That is, we can use our concept of causation to report our experience of constant conjunction where one object moves another. But we should not use it as an *a priori* explanation of what underlies an observed phenomenon that made the phenomenon occur such as causation in the anti-Humean sense as something that *necessitates* constant conjunction.

Now Nietzsche, in a rhetorical flurry, does occasionally overstep the bounds, like when he claims that generalizing, a main feature of becoming conscious of something, involves a “falsification” (GS 354). So there are textual grounds to support the claim that Nietzsche causation, as a generalization of our experience, is a falsification of reality, which of course assumes the appearance/reality distinction. I have tried to show that even if Nietzsche does implicitly rely on this distinction in various places, he explicitly does not make the distinction. Furthermore, the “falsification” language that motivated the distinction can be dismissed as a mistake on Nietzsche’s part. All generalizations are not necessarily falsifications. On the contrary, generalizations often make they make our experiences manageable and coherent through simplification and detail reduction so that we can better navigate through the world or learn something true and valuable. The generalization and simplification of our experiences does not necessarily *falsify* them. A plot summary or a storyline, for instance, does not necessarily falsify the book it summarizes; rather, it (hopefully) provides a comprehensive overview of the story. Likewise, generalizations and inattention to important details and nuances are par for the course in “overview” or “introductory” courses like an introduction to psychology or the history of ancient philosophy. But generalizations are essential for beginning students to learn. Oftentimes an overview of some view is initially presented for the sake of communicating something true but in a way that does not lose sight of its significance in the midst of all the details. The overview can be worked out in more detail and the view can be given full expression. But it does not follow that because there are more details or facts than what an overview states, that the overview is falsifying those (or any) facts. Hence, the claim that what generalizes necessarily falsifies is simply mistaken. So it is unnecessary to take Nietzsche seriously on this point, which means that we need not worry about whether Nietzsche implicitly

makes the distinction between appearance and reality in falsification claims. With that textual objection put to rest, we can focus in on causation as it relates to agency.

Given Nietzsche's skepticism or suspension of judgment about the explanatory power of causation, it is inconsistent to attribute an event-causation view of agency to Nietzsche, as Brian Leiter does (2002: 91-104).¹³ Leiter argues that "type-facts," or the psychological and physical facts about a person including her drives and affects, "are *causally primary* with respect to the person's life," i.e., type-facts, as opposed to say, economic and social forces, are causally primary, and "type-facts are also *explanatorily primary*, in the sense that all other facts about a person (e.g., his beliefs, his actions, his life trajectory) are explicable by type-facts about the person" (2002: 91). Leiter defends his thesis against the claim that Nietzsche is a skeptic about causation by invoking Clark's argument: "since, as Clark has argued most systematically (1990: 103-105), Nietzsche ultimately repudiates the intelligibility of the noumenal/phenomenal distinction, it is unsurprising that his mature works should show none of the NeoKantian skepticism about causation" (forthcoming, 26). Leiter thinks that Nietzsche's skeptical remarks about causation are NeoKantian in the sense that cause and effect are concepts "imposed by the human mind upon a world that, in-itself, contains nothing" like necessary connections (forthcoming, 26).

Leiter claims that statements about imposing concepts on the world are not found in Nietzsche's "mature works," i.e., works written after *Beyond Good and Evil*. So it is surprising to find in *Twilight of the Idols*—a work published in 1888, two years after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*—a "NeoKantian" statement: "we *created* the world on this basis as a world of causes, a world of will, a world of spirits" (TI "Four Errors" 3). Nietzsche claims that

¹³ Katsafanas argues that Nietzsche has a "vector model" account of agency according to which, "the will is simply one source of motivation among many others" where "sources of motivation" cause certain actions (forthcoming a, 34).

three “inner facts,” i.e., the will, causation, and consciousness (or “spirit”) are purported to be empirically observable within the agent. But upon further inspection, no such “facts” are found; nevertheless, “it was out of himself that man *projected* his three ‘inner facts’—that in which he believed most firmly, the will, the spirit, the ego” (TI “Four Errors” 3, emphasis added). When Nietzsche says we “project” our concept of causation and “create the world on the basis of” our concept of causation, it is hard to see how that is not an instance of human concepts being imposed on the world. In addition, as I argued above, it is a mistake to read Nietzsche as a NeoKantian, where a NeoKantian claims that, as Clark puts it, “our beliefs do fail to correspond to things-in-themselves” (1990: 102). But Nietzsche does not claim that the “world in itself” contains nothing like cause and effect. Even if we project causes and effects onto the world, it may mirror causation in the anti-Humean sense. And as I have argued, the unintelligibility of the appearance/reality distinction does not warrant its rejection, but only suspension of judgment.

But even if we accept Clark’s view that what appears to us is reality, Nietzsche claims that *causation does not in fact appear to us*.¹⁴ On Clark’s reading, then, causation must not exist: causation does not appear to us, what appears to us exists, so causation does not exist. Hence Leiter’s use of causation in the event-causalism he ascribes to Nietzsche is ruled out—even on the Clark view he invokes to defend his thesis. So it is difficult to see how Leiter’s event-causalism account is sustainable when his response to Nietzsche’s skepticism about causation is inadequate.

VII. Conclusion

If Nietzsche’s drive-psychology does not result in, among other things, an account of agency, then what is its function? Why would Nietzsche use it to explain beliefs when he thinks

¹⁴ D 121; GS 112; and TI “Four Errors” 3

that causal explanations lack explanatory power? In answering this question, I think it is very useful to take a look at Sextus Empiricus' remarks on why skeptics study natural science:

[Skeptics] do not study natural science in order to make assertions with firm conviction about any of the matters on which scientific beliefs are held. But we do touch on natural science in order to be able to oppose every account an equal account, and for the sake of tranquility. (OS I 18)

As we have seen, Nietzsche's naturalistic drive-psychology is used to oppose both intentionalism and agent-causation, and Nietzsche's skepticism about causation opposes event-causation (i.e., his drive-psychology). So if we understand Nietzsche's enterprise as fundamentally skeptical, we can read Nietzsche's drive-psychology as playing a crucial role in that skeptical project by opposing other dogmas to bring about the suspension of judgment and thereby tranquility. And if we can accept that Nietzsche uses certain concepts without committing to them, i.e., not taking a stance on their truth-value, then his use of causation can be understood as another instance of this method.

Although I have not argued for the point here but mentioned it only in passing, Nietzsche's concern over the harmful effects of Christian morality and the metaphysics that supports it, like free will and the self as a self-sufficient substance, suggest that Nietzsche is concerned with health. And his claim that psychology is the "path to the fundamental problems" suggests that Nietzsche thinks the most important and fundamental problems concern health, especially mental health. According to Sextus, the skeptic's primary aim is also health: "the causal principle of skepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil," where tranquility is "freedom from disturbance or calmness of the soul" (OS I 12, 10). In reading Nietzsche as a skeptic, then, we can avoid attributing a vicious inconsistency to him (an event-causation account of agency paired with his skepticism about causation). We can also understand his drive-

psychology as playing a crucial role in his skeptical project by opposing prevalent dogmas that support Christian or selfless morality, which makes the skeptical reading preferable.

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