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# VIVISECTION AND MORAL INTROSPECTION IN NIETZSCHE

by

JACOB DANIEL HOGAN

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, PhD

## ABSTRACT

Brian Leiter (2002) argues that Nietzsche's claims about value, such as his criticisms of conventional morality, are not objectively grounded but are matters of taste. However, this view (i) conflicts with Nietzsche's rhetoric and (ii) may fall into an unresolvable dilemma, as suggested by Ian Dunkle (2013). In response, I advance the claim that Nietzsche views moral value as being relationally, and thus objectively, grounded. For example, moral value claims can be evaluated as prudentially good or bad for a person by appealing to the relationship between type-level facts about the person and the values they hold. This interpretation more clearly accounts for (i) the philosophical weight Nietzsche saw in his project, (ii) Nietzsche's task to "re-evaluate all values," (iii) his repeated attacks against dogmatism both in and outside philosophy, and (iv) his extensive use of *vivisection* as a morally significant term of art.

INDEX WORDS: Nietzsche, Ethics, Vivisection, Relationalism, Leiter

VIVISECTION AND MORAL INTROSPECTION IN NIETZSCHE

by

JACOB DANIEL HOGAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

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2021

VIVISECTION AND MORAL INTROSPECTION IN NIETZSCHE

by

JACOB DANIEL HOGAN

Committee Chair: Jessica Berry

Committee: Sebastian Rand

Andrea Scarantino

Electronic Version Approved:

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Georgia State University

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**DEDICATION**

For Melanie, William, and Sophia.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Nietzsche's works will be cited by section rather than by page number, using the following abbreviations to refer to these translations (unless otherwise specified):

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

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Nietzsche, Morality, and Higher Humans

One of Nietzsche's most repeated criticisms of conventional morality<sup>1</sup> is that it enforces moral norms that benefit the weakest and most sickly persons at the expense of the greatest and strongest. According to Nietzsche, those harmed by conventional morality are "higher" persons who "*create values*" and are "*commanders and legislators*" (*BGE* §211). Nietzsche contrasts these kinds<sup>2</sup> of persons with the "lower" types, whom he collectively (and somewhat derogatorily) labels "the herd" (see *BGE* §44). In Nietzsche's eyes, conventional moral systems nefariously legislate value<sup>3</sup> absolutely, and do so in favor of the herd. That is, these systems disregard the higher types when offering their moral prescriptions (e.g., *thou shalt be humble* implies that it would be good for *everyone* to be humble). In response, Nietzsche claims:

What is right for someone absolutely *cannot* be right for someone else; that the requirement that there be a single morality for everyone is harmful precisely to the higher men; in short, that there is an *order of rank* between people, and between moralities as well. (*BGE* §228)

Nietzsche's main claim in this passage is straightforward: given that persons are, in respect to morality, different from one another (there exists an "order of rank"), any absolute account of morality is necessarily harmful to those who are not well fitted for it.

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<sup>1</sup> By "conventional morality," I mean the targets of Nietzsche's critiques: Christian, Kantian, Epicurean, Utilitarian, etc., notions of morality, and more broadly speaking, whatever is characteristic about all of these moralities such that Nietzsche opposes them (discussed in **1.1** and **2.3**). For an in-detail discussion of Nietzsche's critical targets, see Leiter (2015) chapter 3, esp. pgs. 58 – 64.

<sup>2</sup> Leiter provides a suggested list of such "higher" persons in Nietzsche's writings: Goethe, Beethoven, Napoleon, "sometimes Caesar," and, Leiter thinks, Nietzsche himself (2015: 93).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper, I use "value" usually to refer to conventional moral values, unless otherwise specified. Conventional moral values are, for example, humility, meekness, lowliness of heart, honesty, truth, self-sacrifice, etc. For Nietzsche's own (non-exhaustive) lists, see *BGE* §1, §2, §4, and §30.

To combat the harms of conventional morality, Nietzsche suggests a “revaluation of values.” This project entails not only that we begin questioning and critiquing our criteria for moral rightness and wrongness, but additionally (and most importantly), whether morality itself is valuable. For example, in §6 of the Preface to *GM*, Nietzsche states that:

One has taken the *value* of these “values” as given, as a fact, as beyond all calling-into-question; until now one has not had even the slightest doubt or hesitation in ranking “the good” as of higher value than “the evil,” [...] What? if the opposite were true? What? if a symptom of regression also lay in the “good,” likewise a danger, a temptation, a poison, a narcotic through which perhaps the present were living *at the expense of the future*? Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but also in a reduced style, on a lower level? ... So that precisely morality would be to blame if a *highest power and splendor* of the human type—in itself possible—were never attained? So that precisely morality were the danger of dangers? ...

By leaving our values unquestioned, Nietzsche thinks that humankind risks unimaginable loss. Specifically, we risk making what is weak and small about our species the norm, thereby setting up the species to degenerate, rather than encouraging what is great and powerful in the very best human beings and allowing them to flourish. To use one of Leiter’s examples: a world without Goethes and Beethovens is simply a poorer world (Leiter 2015: 103).

Nietzsche’s overt preference for higher types is key to understanding his more illiberal and anti-democratic views (*BGE* §22, §202). Nietzsche opposes himself to democracy because of its tendency to “level” all humans by making each person equal to every other (see *BGE* §44). This is harmful precisely to higher types—because each member is given an equal role in the society regardless of their actual abilities, those on the lower end are given more power than they deserve, while those on the higher end are, of necessity, brought lower than they otherwise would or could be. But by reducing the greatness of the best individuals, such systems risk quashing the species’ capacity for greatness as a whole. Nietzsche illustrates this concern by declaring:

Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections? (*Daybreak* §174)

The greatest women and men ever produced by our species were great precisely because they were *not* like everybody else. Total equality among different persons would stymie this kind of greatness.

By undermining the confidence these few higher types may place in conventional values (which thwart their chances of achieving greatness), Nietzsche hopes to free the higher types from their oppression<sup>4</sup> under such value systems and ultimately help them realize their splendor and power. Otherwise, these higher types risk degenerating. In the following passage, note the connection Nietzsche makes between his “revaluation of values” and its ultimate effects on higher individuals:

A revaluation of values whose new pressure and hammer will steel a conscience and transform a heart into bronze to bear the weight of a responsibility like this; and, on the other hand, the necessity of such leaders, the terrible danger that they could fail to appear or simply fail and degenerate – these are *our* real worries and dark clouds [...]. These are the heavy, distant thoughts and storms that traverse the sky of *our* lives. There are few pains as intense as ever having seen, guessed, or sympathized while an extraordinary person ran off course and degenerated. (*BGE* §203)

Nietzsche’s opposition to absolute moralizing, in combination with his overt preference for the “higher” type of human, presents a conceptual puzzle: how does Nietzsche construe his attacks on conventional morality without his own values (e.g., that higher persons are more valuable than members of the herd) falling prey to the same criticism? Likewise, how does he justify his placement of some values over others (e.g., his “ranking” and “revaluation” projects)?

---

<sup>4</sup> Walter Kaufmann (1959: 213–14) lists several forms of “oppression” Nietzsche opposed in Christianity, including: “an antagonism against excellence, a predisposition in favor of mediocrity or even downright baseness, a leveling tendency, the conviction that sex is sinful, a devaluation of both body and intellect in favor of the soul” and more.

## 1.2 The Aestheticist Reading

In his seminal work *Nietzsche on Morality* (2002/2015), Brian Leiter answers the above questions by claiming that Nietzsche advances a robust metaethical view: for Nietzsche, values are not metaphysically real. To say that Nietzsche is an anti-realist is to say that Nietzsche denies that there is any objective justification for holding one value over the other. Instead, humans have merely *interpreted* values from the world through mere convention. In support of this claim, Leiter notes several passages where Nietzsche dismisses the objectivity of values. For example, Nietzsche writes that “whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature – nature is always valueless, but has been *given* value at some time” (*GS* §132). In another passage, Nietzsche states that “there are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena” (*BGE* §108).

Consistent with Nietzsche’s supposed value anti-realist view, Leiter proposes that Nietzsche views value as a matter of *taste*. That is, Leiter reads Nietzsche as arguing that certain values are more “tasteful” than others. Under this view, Nietzsche does not set out to persuade anyone by an appeal to reason. Instead, Leiter thinks that Nietzsche is simply sharing his unique “evaluative sensibility or taste” (2015: 124). Leiter calls this the “aestheticist” reading.

If there is no objective ground for Nietzsche’s claims about value, however, it is difficult to see in what sense Nietzsche’s arguments are intended to persuade us. Leiter thinks that Nietzsche solves this problem by restricting his audience to those of the “right type,” a person of the so-called “higher” type discussed above. This limiting is a useful rhetorical move, for, as Leiter explains, “[if] there are no objective facts about value [...] then it would, indeed, make sense for Nietzsche to want to circumscribe his audience to those who share Nietzsche’s

evaluative taste, those *for whom no justification would be required*” (2015: 122, emphasis added).

However, a complication arises from Leiter’s aestheticist reading: put plainly, Nietzsche simply does not write as if he is expressing his own idiosyncratic views and nothing more. Nietzsche is known for his vehement, confident, even fiery rhetoric—the use of such language would be hard to understand unless Nietzsche took his claims to be *true*. Call this the “rhetoric problem.” This problem suggests that Nietzsche formulated his arguments *not* as expressing his taste and distastes concerning moral values, as Leiter suggests, but as expressing something *objectively true*.

There are a few additional reasons to be dissatisfied with the aestheticist reading. First, Leiter’s reading robs Nietzsche’s arguments of their normative force for persons who are not of the “higher type.” That is, by denying that Nietzsche engages readers at a rational level, Leiter undercuts Nietzsche’s ability to respond to those who disagree with his idiosyncratic tastes. Second, the aestheticist reading may fall into an unresolvable dilemma. Ian Dunkle (2013) argues that, on the one hand, if Nietzsche’s audience *does* share Nietzsche’s tastes, then it seems that they do not require an argument in the first place (recall Leiter’s above-quoted claim that Nietzsche’s audience requires “no justification”). On the other hand, if Nietzsche’s audience *does not* share his tastes, they would not be convinced of his argument because, according to Leiter, Nietzsche does not objectively justify his claims.

I think both the rhetoric problem and Dunkle’s dilemma are unresolvable issues for the aestheticist reading as it stands. However, both problems can be resolved by understanding Nietzsche’s claims about value as *relational* claims *à la* Peter Railton (1986). Railton helpfully argues that there are significant differences between value relativism and value *relationalism*.

While relational value claims are not true as a matter of necessity, they can be objectively true, or verified as true or false by looking at the relationship between the value and the person who holds it. For example, products that contain gluten are nutritious to some persons, but distinctly unhealthy for others (e.g., persons with Celiac Disease). My suggestion in this thesis is that Nietzsche's moral values work the same way, i.e., that Nietzsche can claim that the "goodness" or "badness" of a given value is an objective matter. Nevertheless, no such values will be necessary since the effects of holding those values differ among persons.

Understanding values as relationally grounded motivates a reevaluation of Leiter's aestheticist reading. I will argue that instead of relying on his audience sharing certain *tastes*, Nietzsche instead relies on their having a specific psychological and physiological *constitution*. Since the effects of holding one or another value is, for Nietzsche, relevantly up to our psychophysical constitution, it make sense for Nietzsche to frame his work for those who, due to their constitutions, would benefit from his project. My reading, if correct, strengthens a weak point in Leiter's otherwise compelling interpretation of Nietzsche's naturalism.

## 2 THE RHETORIC PROBLEM

### 2.1 Leiter's Value Anti-Realist Thesis

In “Moral Skepticism and Moral Disagreement in Nietzsche” (2014), Leiter qualifies and adjusts some of the earlier claims he makes in *Nietzsche on Morality* (2002). In both works, Leiter draws on a few key passages from both Nietzsche’s “middle period” and his “mature texts”<sup>5</sup> to support his idea that Nietzsche’s evaluative claims about value are matters of taste.<sup>6</sup> For example, Nietzsche holds that “what is now decisive against Christianity is our taste, no longer our reasons” (*GS* §132). Leiter explicitly compares Nietzsche to “radical anti-realists” who “equate evaluative questions with matters of taste” (2002: 119). For example, Nietzsche states that even justice, and what counts as just or unjust, is “a matter of taste, [and] nothing more” (*GS* §184).

However, if there are no objective values, then how Nietzsche justifies his stance on moral value becomes an open question. As Paul Katsafanas (2015) explains, if moral anti-realism were Nietzsche’s view “we have little reason to concern ourselves with the ungrounded preferences of a long-dead man. It would be far more interesting if there were some good reason for Nietzsche’s invectives” (2015: 408). Leiter himself concedes that “it seems hard to think of Nietzsche as really believing [...] that the evaluative judgments he thrusts upon his readers reflect no objective fact of the matter, that they admit of no objective grounding for those who do not share what simply happens to be Nietzsche’s idiosyncratic evaluative tastes” (2015: 124).

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche’s “middle” texts include *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science*. The “mature texts” begin with *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* through to *Ecce Homo* in 1888.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to point out that Leiter does not think that Nietzsche’s value anti-realist thesis is a *semantic* issue. Leiter thinks that Nietzsche has no considered view about how value terms work in language—Nietzsche presents no developed theory about the correct application of value terms. Nietzsche is simply not interested in semantic theories. Indeed, Leiter explains that “Nietzsche has no discernible semantic view at all” and that he wishes to “concentrate on the metaphysical and epistemological issues” of value instead (2014: 128).



One of the foremost reasons that it is “hard to think” of Nietzsche as only expressing his own tastes is that his writing style is so vehement. For example, consider this passage wherein

Nietzsche criticizes the “loving” acts of Christians:

[Christianity tries] to preserve, to keep everything living that can be kept in any way alive. In fact, they take sides with the failures as a matter of principle, as religions *of the suffering*. They give rights to all those who suffer life like a disease, and they want to make every other feeling for life seem wrong and become impossible. [...] They] have played a principal role in keeping the type “man” on a lower level. They have preserved too much of *what should be destroyed*. [...] And yet, after they gave comfort to the suffering, courage to the oppressed and despairing, a staff and support to the dependent, [...] they had to] crush the strong, strike down the great hopes, throw suspicion on the delight in beauty, skew everything self-satisfied, manly, conquering, domineering, every instinct that belongs to the highest and best-turned-out type of “human,” twist them into uncertainty, crisis of conscience, self-destruction; at the limit, invert the whole love of the earth and of earthly dominion into hatred against earth and the earthly [...] Doesn't it seem as if, for eighteen centuries, Europe was dominated by the single will to turn humanity into a *sublime abortion*? [...] People like *this*, with their “equality before God” have prevailed over the fate of Europe so far, until a stunted, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something well-meaning, sickly, and mediocre has finally been bred: the European of today . . . (*BGE* §62)

In passages like these, Nietzsche appears to be offering something more than his own idiosyncratic “tastes” about value. He writes as if supporting those who “suffer life like a disease” *is wrong*, and that having “delight in beauty” and a “love the earth and of earthly dominion” *is good*. Simply put, Nietzsche appears to write as if he *is* trying to make an argument against conventional morality, specifically one that is rooted in objective facts of the matter, and not just express his own preferences or tastes.

Leiter suggests three ways in which his value anti-realist interpretation can be reconciled with Nietzsche's rhetoric: “First, the rhetoric is forceful, but the language of truth and falsity is conspicuously absent” (2015: 125). That is, while Nietzsche employs “great force and passion in opposition” to conventional morality, “he does not use the epistemic value terms – the language of truth and falsity, real and unreal” (Leiter 2015: 125). Second, Leiter accounts for the volume

of Nietzsche's rhetoric in terms of his desire to "shake the higher types out of their intuitive commitment to the moral traditions of two millennia," and so, Leiter thinks that Nietzsche employs "persuasion through other rhetorical devices," including non-rational ones (2015: 126). Third, and finally, Leiter thinks that "a rhetorical tone like Nietzsche's [... suggests] desperation on the part of the author to reach an increasingly distant and uninterested audience" (2015: 126). The first reason attempts to downplay the force Nietzsche saw in his own argument (making his rhetoric merely hyperbolic), while the second and third suggest that his rhetoric can be explained by certain facts about Nietzsche himself.

## 2.2 Resolving the Rhetoric Problem

There are strong *prima facie* reasons to reject the latter two of Leiter's three reasons. First, the task of understanding a text and the task of understanding the man who wrote it are two very different projects. While it may be appropriate to appeal to certain historical facts about Nietzsche's life to help *support* a particular argument, I think Leiter reaches too far by using these facts to *provide* his solution to the rhetoric problem, as he does for reasons two and three above. One reason for this is that textual evidence from Nietzsche will be stronger, more robust, and more reliable than non-textual evidence. Using background elements<sup>7</sup> of Nietzsche's writing (how they were made, what Nietzsche's mental state was like, what his motivations were, and so

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<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche does seem committed to the idea that one's philosophy is a reflection of oneself. He claims, for instance, that "there is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is*" (BGE §6). Importantly, what Nietzsche is claiming in this passage is that one's philosophy implies something about oneself, but that does not necessarily imply that oneself implies something about one's philosophy! Additionally, my point in this passage is not to wholly discount Nietzsche's lived experiences and other elements from Nietzsche's life, but rather, to explain why they, explanatorily speaking, ought to take a backseat to what Nietzsche *actually does say* about morality.

forth) not only requires extra (and methodologically questionable) interpretive effort, but furthermore, appears to me to be more prone to error and disproportionately reliant on speculation. So, I think there are a few good reasons to prefer the claims Nietzsche does, in fact, make about value over the claims we would need to infer from the facts of his life.<sup>8</sup>

That Leiter bases *two* of his three claims on the facts of Nietzsche's life is problematic; doing so implies that Leiter could not rely on Nietzsche's texts to support his solution to the rhetoric problem. Otherwise, he would have used that textual evidence in his argument (as he does elsewhere). So, we should be hesitant to accept, without finding further confirmation in Nietzsche's written work, reasons two and three (the "persuasion through nonrational means" and "desperation" premises) as solutions to the rhetoric problem.

Finally, recall that Leiter thinks the real problem here is an apparent tension between Nietzsche's overt denial that value claims could be true (because, according to Leiter, Nietzsche is a value anti-realist) and his vehement writing, which at least suggests that he treats the value claims he makes as expressing something true (see the Christianity passage from *BGE* §62

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<sup>8</sup> Additionally, there seems to be a contradiction between the policy Leiter adopts in these passages—where he thinks we can divine Nietzsche's intentions from his writing, and then use those speculations to shore up a philosophical point—and the policy Leiter adopts otherwise with respect to Nietzsche's unpublished notes and fragments. Leiter thinks that *reliance* on those fragments (jointly called the *Nachlass*) is dangerous and philosophically unsound. For example, he states (referring to the *Nachlass* material) that "given that [Nietzsche] wanted the remaining notebook material destroyed [it is surely plausible] that Nietzsche recognized that a lot of this material was of dubious merit. Presumably, then, he would have been surprised to find it at the center of so much contemporary scholarship" (2015: xviii). We might wonder, then, what distinguishes those who wish to use the *Nachlass* indiscriminately and those who wish to use other non-written elements from Nietzsche's life indiscriminately? It is perhaps methodologically problematic to dismiss the rhetoric of Nietzsche's writings in favor of facts about his life and physical environment, much as it would be to dismiss something Nietzsche published in favor of a contradictory fragment from the *Nachlass*. Why should we think one method is respectable and the other is not?

above). And if the rhetoric problem remains unresolved, its persistence will be one reason to reject Leiter's value anti-realist thesis in favor of an alternative. And such an alternative does, in fact, arise from what Nietzsche *does* say about values, specifically, in his "revaluation of all values."

### 2.3 Revaluation and Health

As discussed in the introduction, Nietzsche frames his critique of conventional morality in terms of its propensity to harm higher humans by favoring "the herd." If Nietzsche envisions a *ranking*<sup>9</sup> of various types of persons and the values they hold, then there must be some standard by which a comparison can be made—we need some criterion to sort the "good" from the "bad." The best candidate for such a standard, for Nietzsche, is *health*.

For Nietzsche, health is a good. For example, when reflecting on his life and his work in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes:

I have always instinctively chosen the *correct* remedy for bad states; [...] As *summa summarum* I was healthy; [...] I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again: this is possible – as any physiologist will admit – *as long as you are basically healthy*. [...] For something that is typically healthy, sickness can actually be an energetic *stimulus* to life, to being more alive. [...] I created my philosophy from out of my will to health, to *life* . . . So you should pay careful attention: the years of my lowest vitality were one when I *stopped* being a pessimist: the instinct for self-restoration *prohibited* any philosophy of poverty or discouragement . . . And basically, how do you know that someone has *turned out well!* By the fact that a well-turned-out person does our senses good [...]. What does not kill him makes him stronger [...]. (EH 1 §2)

In this passage, Nietzsche identifies *health* as one measure by which we can identify whether someone is a "well-turned-out person." Herein lies another source of Nietzsche's deep distaste for conventional morality: by *legislating* what will bring about "good" universally, such systems

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<sup>9</sup> See *BGE* §6, §30, and §62.

tend to harm those whose health can only be brought about by other means. In health, the relational goodness or badness of different values is inseparably connected: not only does that which counts as “healthy” differ from one person to another, but crucially, those differences significantly depend on the persons themselves. For example, one may need to gain weight while another needs to lose weight to be healthy, so the same foods will have different values for these different individuals. Thus, the “healthiness” of something cannot be absolute, nevertheless, it can be objective (we could, for example, objectively determine the effects of a particular diet on a particular person). These observations imply that the statement “x is healthy” is true when x has certain *relational* properties between itself and the agent.

Relational values are not the same as relative ones, and it would be a mistake to call Nietzsche a relativist (see Berry 2019). To show that Nietzsche’s conception of health is a relational one, I will draw on a specific example given by Peter Railton (1986). Railton explains that there are significant differences between relativism about value and *relationalism* about value. He states:

All organisms require nutrition, but not the same nutrients. Which nutrients a given organism or type of organism requires will depend upon its nature. [...] There is, then, no such thing as an *absolute* nutrient, that is, something that would be nutritious for all possible organisms. There is only *relational* nutritiveness [...] and] similarly, we might say that although there is no such thing as absolute goodness—that which is good in and of itself, irrespective of what or whom it might be good *for* or the good *of*—there may be relational goodness. [...] It is important to see that relationalism of this sort is distinct from relativism. Heaviness, for example, is a relational concept, nothing is absolutely heavy. [...] Similarly, although a relational conception of value denies the existence of absolute good, it may yield an objectively determinate two-place predicate ‘*X* is part of *Y*’s good.’ (1986: 10–11)

Railton provides an excellent example to clarify these claims: cow’s milk is bad for human babies (1986: 10). To determine the milk’s nutritive value, we need to first get clear on a whole

series of additional modifiers and conditionals, for example, *for typical human babies*<sup>10</sup> or *if the milk is not spoiled*. Despite its not being true or false absolutely, the statement “cow’s milk is unhealthy” can be determined to be *objectively* true or false; it just requires that we consider the relevant organisms in a certain domain (typical human babies) and what in fact brings about a certain condition in them (which we call “health”). For the phrase “x is healthy” to make any sense, we always need to ask, at the very least, “*for whom?*”

If Nietzsche is a value anti-realist, as Leiter argues he is, Nietzsche would not accept the objectivity of even prudential values. In fact, Leiter explicitly states that Nietzsche attributes no truth or falsity to prudential value claims (2014: 128, 2015: x).<sup>11</sup> But if this is the case, Leiter would need to explain why Nietzsche discusses, at great length, the healthy and unhealthy effects of various value systems and, importantly, takes himself to be expressing a truth about those value systems. Indeed, the prudential value of health is not only operative in some of Nietzsche’s critiques of conventional morality, but it also seems to be one of the driving forces behind his calls for the higher types to reject conventional morality altogether. For example, consider this passage from *BGE* §203:

Where do *we* need to reach with our hopes? – Towards *new philosophers*, there is no alternative; towards spirits who are strong and original enough to give impetus to opposed valuations and initiate a revaluation and reversal of “eternal values” [...]. There are few pains as intense as ever having seen, guessed, or sympathized while an extraordinary person ran off course and degenerated: but someone with an uncommon eye for the overall danger that “humanity” itself will *degenerate*, [...] the *total degeneration of humanity* down to what today’s socialist fools and nitwits see as their “man of the future” – as their ideal! – this degeneration and diminution of humanity into the perfect herd animal (or, as they say, into man in a “free society”), this brutalizing

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<sup>10</sup> We could easily imagine, of course, a baby who is miraculously born with the right enzymes to digest cow’s milk. Again, this shows that even fairly restricted claims about cow’s milk and babies requires looking at *individuals*.

<sup>11</sup> This is a change from Leiter’s earlier (2002) view.

process of turning humanity<sup>12</sup> into stunted little animals with equal rights and equal claims is no doubt *possible!*

Nietzsche casts his opposition to conventional morality in terms of its unhealthy effects (i.e., that the effects are contrary to one's flourishing)—it makes humans “stunted,” “weak,” and “degenerate.” These kinds of claims are predicated on the idea that conventional morality is *unhealthy* for higher persons, or that the well-being of higher persons is jeopardized by conventional morality, which is itself a prudential value claim (see *GM I §6*). But if such value claims cannot be objectively true or false (because no values are metaphysically real), then nothing could *really* be said to be healthy or unhealthy for anyone, which I take is a claim Nietzsche would want to reject.

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<sup>12</sup> Usually when Nietzsche uses “humanity” or “the crowds” in the general sense, he is usually referring to the “herd.” For example, he states that “every choice human being strives instinctively for a citadel and secrecy where he is *rescued* from the crowds, the many, the vast majority; where, as the exception, he can forget the human norm” (*BGE §26*; see also *BGE §203* and *§62*).

### 3 THE AESTHETICIST READING

Now that I have examined Nietzsche's relationalism, the groundwork is laid to return to the aestheticist reading. Recall that the primary purpose of Leiter's aestheticist reading is to identify the grounds for Nietzsche's normative claims. Leiter and I agree that a person's psychological and physiological facts are sufficient for explaining why they find certain things, and not others, valuable (see Leiter 2015: 120). However, Leiter proposes that Nietzsche's own evaluative claims are merely matters of his own taste or preference. In what follows, I will explain how the aestheticist reading runs afoul not only of Nietzsche's relationalism, but also of Dunkle's Dilemma.

Recall that Leiter proposes that Nietzsche argues against conventional morality by appealing to the goodness of health, and a set of tastes he assumes his audience shares, and by showing that conventional morality has a number of unhealthy, or "distasteful," effects on higher persons. Leiter explicitly rejects that Nietzsche can provide any objective justification for his evaluative claims, and instead thinks that Nietzsche simply relies on his audience sharing his moral preferences.

Dunkle's Dilemma introduces a difficult problem for the aestheticist reading. Specifically, the two "horns" of Dunkle's Dilemma are that either (i) Nietzsche's audience shares his aesthetic tastes, but then Nietzsche's argument is unnecessary, or (ii) Nietzsche's audience does not share his aesthetic tastes, but then his argument is unpersuasive. To the first horn: why would Nietzsche attempt to convince an audience who already share his evaluative tastes? By stipulating that Nietzsche's audience already shares his tastes, Leiter inadvertently turns all of Nietzsche's works into mere "preaching to the choir." To the second horn: according to Leiter,



Nietzsche provides no justifications for his claims. So, for someone who does not share Nietzsche's preferences, his arguments will be unconvincing.

Another way of cutting up the horns of the dilemma is to identify (i) with the higher types and (ii) with the lower types. For the first group, Nietzsche cannot "convince" a higher person to share his evaluative tastes because, to be a higher type in the first place, they would need to share his tastes already. For the second group, Nietzsche cannot provide justification for why someone of the lower type should prefer the flourishing of the higher type, especially since they lack the relevant aesthetic values. But if Nietzsche's intended audience can be neither higher nor lower types, then it seems Nietzsche has no audience at all.

One tempting way to get around this dilemma is to assume that there are "nascent" higher humans, or persons halfway between the two groups, that need Nietzsche's "push" to realize that conventional morality is bad for them. Couldn't Nietzsche convince this group that they ought to share Nietzsche's evaluative tastes? Dunkle replies that this adjustment to the aestheticist reading is still defeated through the second horn: if a person is a "nascent" type, then when they are "confronted with a conflict between the taste they share with Nietzsche and their current taste for morality, Nietzsche's audience must be disposed to reject the latter in favor of the former in order for Nietzsche's critical argument to have its desired effect" (Dunkle 2013: 447). However, these individuals are currently among the lower types, and thus, still require some *reason* to reject their current tastes in favor of Nietzsche's. But "how can Nietzsche rely upon his audience having this reaction without his being able to give a reason?" (Dunkle 2013: 447).

The crux of Dunkle's response to the "nascent higher human" proposal lies in Nietzsche's inability to be confident in the tastes his audience already shares. Specifically, if a person has mutable tastes (e.g., preferring conventional morality before reading Nietzsche and

agreeing with Nietzsche afterward), then that person's tastes are unstable. But Leiter's aestheticist reading depends on Nietzsche's audience having the right tastes to begin with—it is precisely in sharing Nietzsche's evaluative taste that Nietzsche's audience is established in the first place. Worse, since Leiter also holds that Nietzsche can offer no rational justification for his evaluative claims, the very fact that these “nascent” types *start off* disagreeing with Nietzsche is alone enough to conclude that nothing in Nietzsche's argument will reliably convince them.

The conclusions of these two arguments leave us at an impasse. While Dunkle seems to have provided a convincing argument against Leiter's aestheticist reading, he does not develop a fully satisfactory counter-proposal. Here I will argue for another possible reading, comparable in structure to the aestheticist reading, but one that avoids Dunkle's Dilemma. Instead of grounding his evaluative claims in his audience's *tastes*, why not ground it in the *natural facts* that give rise to those tastes? As I explained in the previous section, these natural facts relationally determine the goodness or badness of values—why not use those same facts to understand how Nietzsche constructs his arguments?

### 3.1 Type-Facts and Drives

Since Dunkle's Dilemma undermines the appeal to taste as way of understanding the force of Nietzsche's evaluative claims, I propose that we instead take a single step back and examine the type-facts (natural facts about one's psycho-physical constitution) that give rise to those tastes. If this reading is successful, then Nietzsche's evaluative claims can, in fact, be objectively verifiable: they have such-and-such real effects on so-and-so types of persons because of the relevant relations between the two. However, this reading would need to show how these

descriptive psychological and physiological facts can be appealed to without running afoul of Nietzsche's suspicions about absolute value claims and his skepticism more generally.

Nietzsche repeatedly appeals to certain natural facts about the human condition in his critiques of conventional morality. For example, in Book 1 of *BGE*, Nietzsche challenges the notion that we have the kind of free will that traditional moral responsibility requires. Nietzsche's argument begins by examining certain natural facts about our psycho-physical constitution: who or what the "I" is, what it wills (what its motives are), and how it wills. Ultimately, Nietzsche concludes that natural facts of our human condition are such that no ascription of moral praise or blame is rationally warranted. Specifically, Nietzsche finds no unified self and thus no clear way to determine the ultimate source of one's motives. It follows from these features of our natural constitution that it would be impossible for conventional morality to *function*. For example, how could conventional morality determine who is just and unjust if there are no unified selves nor clear motives for any given action?

To see how conventional morality is threatened if these natural facts are true, consider who or what the "I" is. In *BGE* §17, Nietzsche argues that "a thought comes when 'it' wants, and not when 'I' want. It is, therefore, a *falsification* of the facts to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think.'" But if there is no *subject*, no "I" that exclusively does the thinking, then how could we be responsible for "moral" or "immoral" thinking? For example, the existence of subconscious drives and impulses implies that the "I" is not a purely rational "subject" who chooses what to think and what to believe. What is especially troubling about the idea that our thoughts are instinctively or unconsciously guided is that this influence is *opaque* to us. We "feel" from the inside as if "we" are in control, but this is not so. Nietzsche's

observations about the kinds of beings we are complicate the ascription of moral praise and blame, and might even make such ascriptions impossible.

In the context of assertions like these, Nietzsche's claim that psychology is the "queen of the sciences" and "the path to the fundamental problems" becomes clear (*BGE* §23). Psychology is useful because it has the tools to get at the fundamental, natural facts about our mental lives, our behaviors, and so forth. In the next section, I want to explore how this same procedure (starting with the natural facts and moving up to philosophically significant conclusions) might be used to further illuminate Nietzsche's relational conception of value.

### 3.2 Revisiting the Aestheticist Reading

As shown in the previous section, Nietzsche's arguments proceed from an investigation into the natural facts about human beings. Nietzsche then uses those facts to undermine conventional morality. If we assume that Nietzsche uses this same methodology to support his arguments in *favor* of his own ideals, then we might fruitfully adjust the aestheticist argument by replacing "tastes" with "type-facts." First, note that this adjustment still makes use of Nietzsche's "restricted audience," but with some alteration. The aestheticist reading restricted Nietzsche's audience to those who shared Nietzsche's evaluative tastes. The proposed adjustment instead narrows Nietzsche's audience to those *capable* of agreeing with him, i.e., to those who have the right psycho-physical constitution. And there is some textual evidence that suggests Nietzsche does, in fact, think this way. For example, he states: "you need to have been born for any higher world; to say it more clearly, you need to have been *bred* for it: only your descent, your ancestry can give you a right to philosophy – taking that word in its highest sense. Even here, 'bloodline' is decisive" (*BGE* §213).

Additionally, recall that Leiter explains that “the core of Nietzsche’s critique is simply that [conventional morality] has a *deleterious effect on higher men*” (2015: 99). However, what makes a person a “higher type” has to do primarily with a person’s type-facts. Even Leiter concedes that “for Nietzsche [...] being a ‘well-turned-out’ person is importantly the product of ‘natural’ facts” about them (1992: 289). So, if the health of higher humans is the relevant issue at stake, it would make sense for Nietzsche to be concerned with whether his audience has (or is capable of having) the relevant psycho-physical traits that separate the higher from the lower persons in the first place; indeed, whether or not they find his views aesthetically superior to the alternatives will be, ultimately, a consequence of their constitutions.

Just as Nietzsche’s arguments against conventional morality proceed by identifying some of the types that are benefitted or harmed by conventional morality, so too can his positive ideals be explained by appeal to type-facts. Several passages imply that Nietzsche expected his audience to know (or be capable of discovering) type-level facts about what kinds of beings we are before they would be capable of rejecting conventional morality. The critical question, then, is why Nietzsche thinks facts about our psychophysical condition will vindicate his belief that conventional morality is unhealthy. The clearest answer to the above question is, in my view, to be found in Nietzsche’s repeated call for his audience to engage in “vivisection.”

## 4 VIVISECTION

### 4.1 Historical Context

Nietzsche uses “vivisection [*Vivisektion*]” (either by word or by image) over twenty-five times throughout his published works. For example, in *BGE* §218 Nietzsche calls for his opponents to “vivisect the ‘good man,’ the ‘*homo bonae voluntatis*’—*yourselves!*” Nietzsche thinks that by doing so, they would “study the philosophy of the ‘rule’ in its struggle against the ‘exception’” and there they would see “drama good enough for gods and divine malice!” In *BGE* §210, he likewise argues that the so-called “philosophers of the future” will “[take] *pleasure* in saying no, in dissecting, and in a certain level-headed cruelty that knows how to guide a knife with assurance and subtlety, even when the heart is bleeding.” What is the significance of this imagery for Nietzsche’s claims about the connection between values and health?

“Vivisection” comes from the Latin “*vivis*” (living) and “dissection” (to cut open to study); it is “the action of cutting or dissecting some part of a living organism [or] other *painful experiment*, upon living animals as a method of *physiological or pathological study*” (OED, my emphasis). It is both illustrative and interesting to note that, in Nietzsche’s time, medical vivisection was under intense political and social scrutiny. Some saw it as barbarous, and campaigned to outlaw the practice, while others defended it as a critical contribution to medicinal advancement. One historical account of vivisection states that “in the nineteenth century the [anti-vivisectionists] raised petitions with hundreds of thousands of signatures, more than for any other cause of the time,” even to the point that anti-vivisection became the “*cause celebre*” of humanitarians in Nietzsche’s day (Bates 2017: 14).

Though there is no evidence that Nietzsche followed the controversy or developed a position on this social issue, he could hardly have failed to be aware of it, and some elements of

the “pro-vivisection” argument might help unpuzzle Nietzsche’s use of this term in his moral philosophy. Another passage from that same historical record is particularly telling:

Without animal experimentation, the course of medicine would have been radically different. [...] To experimentalists, it was axiomatic that medical science must be objective, rational, and dispassionate: if its advancement required the infliction of pain on laboratory animals, then it was unprofessional, even unethical, to allow squeamishness or sentiment to get in the way. (Bates 2017: 13)

While Nietzsche’s use of the word “vivisection” carries some of these same implications, it is important to note that the epistemic values that “pro-vivisectionists” have (i.e., objectivity, rationality, dispassionate investigation) are also ones Nietzsche openly disparages (see *BGE* §207). Instead, Nietzsche urges us to be “hard” and even “cruel” to ourselves in the process of seeking greatness (e.g., “researchers to the point of cruelty”), which appear to be more plausible versions of the epistemic values that Nietzsche holds (*BGE* §44). But, when it comes to questions of the flourishing of the species, it appears that Nietzsche would agree with their methods (being cruel) and their ideals (e.g., not allowing squeamishness or sentimentality to get in the way of research). If we are concerned with the flourishing of humans, and if our advancement requires the infliction of pain, then we ought not to let our compassion for humankind turn destructive by being so concerned about suffering that we fail to do what is required.<sup>13</sup>

Vivisection also implies something *painful* for the vivisected. In addition to the memorable passage about sand<sup>14</sup> quoted above, there is another telling passage where Nietzsche discusses the benefits of “painful” situations for humanity. He states:

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<sup>13</sup> So-called “helicopter parenting” might be a useful analogy here.

<sup>14</sup> “Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into sand? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections?” (*Daybreak* §174).

What [others] want to strive for with all their might is the universal, green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, contentment, and an easier life for all [...] and they view suffering itself as something that needs to be *abolished*. We, who are quite the reverse, [...] think that [flourishing] has always happened under conditions that are quite the reverse. We think that the danger of the human condition has first had to grow to terrible heights [...] We think that harshness, violence, slavery, danger in the streets and in the heart, concealment, Stoicism, the art of experiment, and devilry of every sort; that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical, predatory, and snakelike in humanity serves just as well as its opposite to enhance the species “humanity.” (*BGE* §44)

There is no doubt that vivisection is a cause of great suffering. Vivisection *requires* the patient to be living (otherwise, it is an *autopsy*), and is done more for the vivisector's benefit than that of the vivisected (going under the knife for the patient's own benefit is considered a *surgery*).

However, as this passage implies, Nietzsche likely thinks it “serves to enhance the species.”

Lastly, it is important to note that Nietzsche imagines vivisection as specifically something one might undertake to do to *oneself*, figuratively speaking. For example, in *GM III*: §9, Nietzsche writes that:

We experiment with ourselves as we would not permit ourselves to do with any animal and merrily and curiously *slit open our souls while the body is still living*: what do we care anymore about the ‘salvation’ of the soul! [...] We do *violence to ourselves* now, there is no doubt, we nutcrackers of souls, we questioners and questionable ones, as if life were nothing but nutcracking. (*GM III*: §9, emphasis added)

To be bold (or perhaps reckless) enough to cut *ourselves* open and perform this experiment on our souls while we still live seems an incredibly difficult (or perhaps impossible) task to undertake. Yet, this is precisely what Nietzsche suggests in these passages. So, what are the benefits of vivisection? Why does Nietzsche use this metaphor instead of something more benign (like “surgery [*Chirurgie*],” “operation [*Operation*],” or “autopsy [*Autopsie*]”)?



## 4.2 Vivisection as a Morally Significant Term of Art

I think we can make sense of Nietzsche's use of the language and imagery of vivisection by interpreting it as having a three-fold purpose: (i) the painful nature of vivisection excludes certain persons (e.g., the weak or the squeamish) from using it; (ii) the educational or investigational purpose of vivisection is consistent with the spirit of Nietzsche's inquiry; and (iii) the empirical nature of vivisection that inquiry underscores that Nietzsche rejects the "mind" as a disembodied entity, separable from bodies, and instead sees all human phenomena—morality included—as something grounded in our physiology and psychology. As we consider these points in turn, we will see how the idea of "vivisection" as a morally significant term of art lends support to my reading of Nietzsche as a relationalist about value.

First, Nietzsche's use of vivisection as a figure for the kind of moral introspection his project requires prevents those unable to "stomach" the cruelty and visceral nature of the vivisectioning act from undertaking it. In this regard, the ability to vivisection might be another division between higher and lower types—whereas members of the herd want comfort and ease, the higher types embrace the "dangerous knowledge" that come from vivisection (*BGE* §23). For example, Nietzsche anticipates the "*more profound* world of insight" to be gained through the cutting psychological investigations of the mind, and for the higher types that engage in such an enterprise, such results in the "crushing and perhaps destroying the remnants of [their] own morality by daring to travel there" (*BGE* §23). So, we might interpret Nietzsche's use of vivisection as a kind of philosophical gatekeeping: one would need to be the right *kind* of person, one capable of vivisectioning (and thereby destroying the "old" morality) to fully appreciate Nietzsche's new moral project.

Second, vivisection implies an *investigative* act. Medical professionals are, after all, attempting to gain some kind of *knowledge* by vivisection—in other words, their goal is to learn something about the animal being vivisected. This educational element is absent from similar terms Nietzsche could have employed, such as “surgery” or “therapy,” both of which imply that the act is beneficial to the one who receives it. Vivisection, on the other hand, seems exclusively for the benefit of the vivisector, often at the (excruciating) cost of the vivisected. So, if Nietzsche asks his audience to vivisect *themselves* or “the good man,” the logical question that follows this is: what does Nietzsche think that the right kind of person will *learn* when they cut themselves or someone else open? What is the aim of the “study” of vivisection for the types capable of undertaking such a task, especially as it relates to morality and values?

Nietzsche might suggest that when we “open ourselves up,” figuratively speaking, we discover nothing “magic” or “special” in humans that makes us any different from the animals. Surely this fact, as much or more than any other, has moral implications. This fact implies, among other things, that humankind differs from the animals not by type, but by degree. This may imply that it is unlikely that humankind has a “higher destiny” or a unique place over and above “the animal.” Indeed, from Nietzsche’s perspective, no medical science has ever furnished evidence that we are anything more than highly advanced animals. So, vivisection may be an act of realizing the *animal nature* of man, of putting the human right back on par with the other primates. Nietzsche himself discusses this possibility in *BGE* §230, where he writes that a task for future philosophers is to “translate humanity back into nature” and “to make sure that, from now on, the human being [stands] before the human being, just as he already stands before the *rest* of nature.”

Finally, given Nietzsche's repeated insistence that our philosophical and non-philosophical thinking is determined by our psychology and physiology, we can suppose that vivisection will yield important data about how our constitution is influenced by the values we hold. What is there to discover when we cut ourselves open *other than* the natural components of which we are constituted, and how those components are influenced by (and influence) our actions and behaviors, and by extension, or values? Why else would Nietzsche keep returning to issues of biology and bloodline in a treatise on *morals*, unless biology was a determinate factor in our "moral" makeup? Since Nietzsche's arguments against morality are based on psychological and physiological facts about us, it makes sense that to *verify* these claims, we would need to vivisect ourselves, or to "dig into" our psychology and physiology. Nietzsche's call is, quite literally, for morality to get to the real and very human heart of the matter.

## 5 CONCLUSION

If my proposed account is correct, then we have a few reasons to adjust the aestheticist reading and reject that Nietzsche is an anti-realist about value. I have argued that Leiter's reading should be tied more immediately to Nietzsche's understanding of morality as rooted in our psychology and physiology, specifically, through a relational understanding of value. Additionally, my reading, which emphasizes these elements, makes sense of Nietzsche's extended use of vivisection as a morally significant term of art. Nietzsche's use of the language and imagery of vivisection is particularly telling in the context of moral values: if morality is merely a matter of *taste*, why would Nietzsche call for us to investigate our physiology and psychology, and why would he promote these investigations as a means to philosophical ends? Why the emphasis on breeding, bloodlines, and biology?

This interpretation also makes sense of Nietzsche's oft-repeated calls to *action* on our part as readers. Instead of showing us the "right" path amid all the wrong ones he discredits, Nietzsche says: "This—is now *my* way: where is yours?" (Z, Gravity §2). In this context, Nietzsche's project appears to be an attempt, more or less, to encourage suspicion on our part, which in turn leads us to turn inwards to see if he is right.

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