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doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/29347754>

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The Moralization of Nietzsche

by

Barry Farmer

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, PhD

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

2022

## ABSTRACT

The inflammatory and elitist language Nietzsche uses in *Beyond Good and Evil* to describe the relationship between the ruling class and the underclass is often read as hyperbolic, and attempts are often made in the secondary literature to spare him the appearance of advocating gratuitous exploitation. This thesis challenges the assumption that Nietzsche is speaking hyperbolically in the passages in question. It argues in fact that the descriptive project Nietzsche undertakes in *Beyond Good and Evil* requires the *prima facie* radical exploitation it puts forward. The central aim of the thesis is to situate his description of human exploitation within the broader framework of a perfectionistic account the conditions of human advancement.

INDEX WORDS: Perfectionism, Culture, Slavery, Exploitation, Supra-moral, Flourishing

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2022

# The Moralization of Nietzsche

by

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May 2022

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis work is dedicated to my life partner, Dr. Bonita Senior, who has been a constant source of encouragement and support through this challenging time of graduate studies. I am deeply thankful for having you in my life. I am also thankful for my family, especially for my mother Brenda Farmer and for my children India Golden, Eva Golden, Montana Farmer, Graham Farmer, and Stephania Farmer, who are all fountains of inspiration and encouragement.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

For having given me my first in-depth exposure to Nietzsche and for her apparently infinite patience in guiding me through the thesis process I am deeply indebted to my teacher and thesis advisor, Dr. Jessica Berry. I also owe a special thanks to my other thesis committee member, Dr. Timothy O'Keefe for his insightful suggestions and encouragement at various stages of the writing process. While professors Berry and O'Keefe gave me indispensable guidance throughout this project, they also allowed me the latitude and freedom to make the work my own.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the opening line from Part IX of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche offers the following insight regarding certain preconditions for human perfection. “Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society – and it will be so again and again – a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other” (*BGE* 257). In the very next section Nietzsche expands on what he intends here by “slavery” with the exhortation there that the subjugated be treated as less than fully human:

The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy, however, is that it experiences itself not as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their meaning and highest justification – that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, for its sake must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments. (*BGE* 258)

There is a reading of the exploitation painted in these passages that suggests Nietzsche is describing something less radical here than first meets the eye. This reading would have it that, in the context of the flourishing society Nietzsche envisions, servitude constitutes its own form of thriving and is consequently in the best interest of the enslaved. What is more, this reading proposes that the greatest meaning and fulfillment such individuals are capable of attaining in life *necessitates* their servitude.

I will take issue with this characterization of the exploitation Nietzsche describes in *BGE*. My thesis will be that [1] the human flourishing Nietzsche envisions in this text *requires* the *prima facie* radical exploitation referenced above, and that [2] to characterize it as ultimately benign to the fortunes of those who suffer it would be to moralize the consummate immoralist and to give his supra-moral description of the conditions of human perfection a moral tone he would have rejected.

Roughly speaking, I will divide the paper into two main sections. In the first of them I will examine two related but distinct interpretations of the texts referenced above, one advanced by Andrew Huddleston, the other by Jeffrey Church. Contra my own reading, these interpreters take Nietzsche to suppose that when modern cultures thrive in the sense to be described, their flourishing ultimately redounds to the benefit of everyone, including those they exploit. In order to support this claim, both commentators widen conceptions of key terms like ‘exploitation’ and ‘slavery.’ I will explain in what sense expanding these concepts putatively serves to underwrite claims that Nietzsche sees the subjugation of the modern underclass by the elite as less radical than it he makes it seem. Finally, I will attempt to contrast their respective accounts regarding these particulars before going on to discuss the overall inconsistencies of both positions with Nietzsche’s texts.

In the second part of the paper, I will use Nietzsche’s clear characterizations of the preconditions of human perfection, particularly those he offers in *BGE*, to counter or at least to seriously qualify assumptions central to the accounts rendered in section one. I will argue firstly that the interpretive missteps these commentators make can be traced back to two mistaken assumptions. The first is that Nietzsche’s representations of the preconditions for human perfection are prescriptive in nature as opposed to descriptive. The second is that Nietzsche’s views regarding the character of these preconditions remain nearly static throughout the periods of his publications. Where my interlocutors spy only minor shifts in Nietzsche’s characterizations, I will show that Nietzsche makes clean breaks. Finally, I will lay out what I take to be Nietzsche’s descriptive account of the conditions of human perfection, an account which is clear-eyed about their rapacious character but that obviates his seeming relish for rapine.

## 2 THE CULTURAL READING

Andrew Huddleston offers an insightful version of the paradigmatic view I introduced above, in which Nietzsche is read as depicting an aristocratic society whose flourishing ultimately redounds to the benefit rather than the detriment of those it exploits. I will refer to this generic interpretation as the “cultural reading.” In “Consecration to Culture: Nietzsche on Slavery and Human Dignity,” Huddleston suggests that, given the hyperbolic force his language, Nietzsche is often naturally misread as advocating slavery. Against this “natural” interpretation, Huddleston asserts the following: “In this paper I will spell out what conception of a person’s flourishing Nietzsche is working with, what sense of ‘slavery’ he has in mind, and why he thinks this form of ‘slavery’ is the best sort of life for all but a few individuals” (Huddleston 2014, 136).

Huddleston’s initial remarks will accordingly be definitional. He will attempt to explain what Nietzsche intends by such terms as ‘interest,’ and ‘flourishing,’ and since Huddleston’s central concern involves the question, “what, on Nietzsche’s view, is in the interests of a given set of people,” we might look first at what he thinks Nietzsche means by the term, ‘interest.’ Firstly, Huddleston insists this term should not be taken idiomatically, or in the sense that we might refer, for instance, to one’s interest who (to use Huddleston’s example) wishes to while-away his days lazing in a drunken stupor. Rather he thinks what Nietzsche has in mind is “the more paternalistic, *father-knows-best* sense of ‘interest,’ where the word ‘interest’ often gets prefaced by ‘best.’” This sense of the term carries the implication that one could in some sense be estranged from one’s own interests. While it may be possible to conceive of an individual being alienated from or mistaken about her own desires, it is much easier to imagine someone being oblivious to or mistaken about what is in her own best interest in some matter. Huddleston thinks this is the sense in which Nietzsche uses the term when referring to morality (pejoratively)

as being contrary to the interest of some. Thus, Huddleston refers to ‘interests’ in the sense of ‘objective interests,’ to accentuate the idea that one’s interests might well be something other than what one desires or even believes is in one’s *best* interest.

Huddleston, then, refers to this notion of erroneously believing something is in one’s best interest as the individual’s laboring under a “false consciousness” about that belief. False consciousness will come to mean more than this, but initially he speaks of it in terms of a false sense of what is in one’s real interests. Huddleston wants to say that, because Nietzsche’s correctives generally appear to be aimed at higher types, many Nietzsche commentators naturally assume that it is primarily the powerful who are under the influence of false consciousness respecting their real interests. That is to say, it *appears* to be the aristocrat not the plebian whom Nietzsche strives to disabuse of the belief that morality “in the pejorative sense” is in his best interest. Huddleston, however, disagrees with this narrow ascription of false consciousness. He argues that Nietzsche does not restrict the notion of false consciousness to the aristocracy. Rather, he says, “Instead of confining this false consciousness to the Nietzschean elite, we should, I will be arguing here, see the rest of mankind – ‘the weak’ – as afflicted by it as well. For although it is right that the weak benefit from the morality system in several ways, on another, more important level Nietzsche sees them as its victims” (Huddleston 2014, 140).

It is not clear to me why Huddleston thinks Nietzsche confining false consciousness to the elite is a “prominent reading” or a received view, given that the preponderance of the literature seems to take it that the generality of mankind has been seduced by the ideology of religious morality. Perhaps Huddleston is merely nodding here to a consensus in the literature that sees Nietzsche’s as relatively unconcerned about the weak. In any event, he attempts to overthrow this “prominent reading” by invoking what Nietzsche portrays as the duping of the

greater portion of mankind by the priestly class, by Kant, Bentham, and more “secular” moral thinkers. He takes it that in Nietzsche’s mind their ideologies were, after Christianity itself, the principal sources of inspiration for false consciousness in the sense described, and he spends the first part of the essay explaining their popularity and significance.

According to Huddleston, these ideologies appealed to the underclass broadly speaking in at least two respects. In the first place, Kant, the utilitarians, and the priests, as peddlers of Christian dogma and morality, were trading on the profound suffering and existential uncertainties of the weak. They played upon their anxieties, their aversion to suffering, and their need for meaning in the face of suffering and certain death. In exchange for this worldly unease these teachers tendered certitude and meaning. Their ideologies offered the weak an explanation for their suffering, and just as importantly, the pledge of ultimate vindication on Judgment Day when they will be eternally rewarded and their oppressors eternally damned. Nietzsche himself describes the appeal of their dogma in characteristically ironic terms,

In faith in what? In love of what? In hope of what? – These weak ones – for *they* too want to be the strong ones someday, there is no doubt, someday *their* “kingdom” too shall come – “the kingdom of God” as they simply call it, as I mention earlier: they are so humble in all things after all! Even to experience *that* people will need to live a long time, beyond death – indeed they need eternal life so that in the “kingdom of God” they can recoup their losses... (*GM* I:15)

These ideologies appealed to a hidden lust for power that the weak were too disingenuous to acknowledge, and Nietzsche has here stripped the cloak of hypocrisy from the supposedly meek and humble who craved power like everyone else.

But according to Huddleston, Nietzsche’s scorn for the weak and especially for their attachment to the “next world” is inspired by something more pernicious than the pretense he puts his finger on here. It is their nihilistic devaluation of the *present* world that aroused his

ire, “this *nihilism of otherworldliness* (that) denigrates even the best that we living human beings can attain in the name of something we cannot...” (Thompson 2011, 12). The moralists and priestly class enticed them to embrace a vocation whose spurious succor diverted them from what Nietzsche considers their true calling, something Huddleston insists is decidedly this-worldly: “Nietzsche thinks that their highest calling is a strenuous one that they will try to avoid. The best life is one of participation in, or in the service of, the cultural sphere, whether it be through promoting the lives of a few great individuals, or in aiding the flourishing of the cultural whole.” (Huddleston 2014, 141) Nietzsche, it would appear, agrees. For it is in opposition to just such metaphysical enticements that Zarathustra counters with an appeal of his own:

I beseech you my brothers remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes. Poison mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary so let them go. Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.  
(Z Prologue 3)

Zarathustra expresses this admonition in the context of articulating his vision for human flourishing. He warns against the corrupt counsel of those that despise life. They are those who continue to promote duty to a deceased unknowable deity whose authority has been obviated by his visible entrails. Humanity’s duty (to promote human flourishing) is a this-worldly vocation, and to neglect it in pursuit of an illusory hope or spurious comfort would be sinful. Sinful because whatever profit might be gained in the service of such moral pursuits would ultimately serve to deflect humanity from their true vocation. And Huddleston insists this true vocation is an attenuated form of slavery: “(t)he benefits gained by the weak are meretricious when set against what Nietzsche regards as needed if they are to truly flourish: and that is to be ‘slaves’ – in some attenuated sense, at least...” (Huddleston 2014, 140).

The other broad sense in which these ideologies appealed to the weak was this: they conferred upon their signatories a certain dignity. According to Huddleston, the devotees of “Christianity (and the morality it spawned) were deceived into accepting the delusion that they are atomic individuals of infinite worth” (Huddleston 2014, 140). Kant assured them they were ends in themselves. The priests taught them that they bore the image of God, that they were in fact the “apple of his eye” and possessed immortal souls. In Nietzsche’s words,

That everyone as an “immortal soul” has equal rank with everyone else, that in the totality of living beings the “salvation” of *every* single individual may claim eternal significance, that little gnats and three-quarter-madmen may have the conceit that the laws of nature are constantly broken for their sakes – such an intensification of every kind of selfishness into the infinite, into the *impertinent*, cannot be branded with too much contempt. And yet Christianity owes its triumph to this miserable flattery of personal vanity: it was precisely all the failures, all the rebellious-minded, all the less favored, the whole scum and refuse of humanity who were thus won over to it. The “salvation of the soul” – in plain language: the world revolves around *me* (A 43).

The moralists’ masterstroke was persuading those who were intended as grist for the mill that they were in fact, finished loaves. The appeal and ultimate triumph of Christianity, according to Nietzsche, was this power to invert the individuals’ sense of self-worth, to persuade those whom even the Apostle Paul deemed the “refuse and offscouring of the world” (I Cor. 4:13), that each one of them was a locus of the intense interest and redemptive activity of the creator. Under this new moral regime, the notion of social rank was obliterated – the dignity of the individual was regarded as innate. The priests and moralists inculcated this principle of intrinsic human value unanimously, and of all its pernicious tendencies, its most contemptable in Nietzsche’s view was its inflationary and egalitarian view of innate human worth.

However, Huddleston cautions us against supposing that because Nietzsche rejects the idea of innate human dignity he therefore attributes human worth exclusively or even primarily

to the elite. For he says that while Nietzsche is at odds with conceptions of *innate* human worth and dignity, he nevertheless sees these virtues themselves as fair game for everyone. But by Nietzsche's lights they must be earned. As Huddleston expresses the matter,

Although Nietzsche's conception of human worth and dignity is alien to more traditional Christian and Kantian conceptions of these terms, the idea of human worth and dignity, as the grounds on which a person merits respect, plays a central role in his value theory. The most basic difference between Nietzschean worth and dignity on the one hand and Christian and Kantian worth and dignity on the other is that Christian and Kantian worth and dignity is something that humans have equally and innately. Nietzschean worth and dignity, by contrast is inegalitarian and achieved: humans do not have it equally; they must earn it and earn the respect it merits by what they do. (Huddleston 2014, 143)

Huddleston takes Nietzsche's conception of human worth and dignity to be within the reach of everyone, even in an aristocratic society. A socially rigid aristocratic society such as this might be described as meritocratic in character. Huddleston will attempt to exploit this point further on in offering it in support for his thesis that the social system Nietzsche describes, particularly the slavery it involves, constitutes its own form of thriving and is on that basis ultimately benign to the slave. If human worth and dignity can be achieved by anyone and everyone regardless of their social station or even their caste, then one may flourish in a social system regardless of social station or even caste.

In order to make the connection between a meritocracy and human dignity clearer Huddleston explains at length how Nietzsche defines human worth. He does so initially by explaining Nietzsche's aversion for the modern liberal incarnation of the concept. His disdain for the individual's "claim to eternal significance" and innate worth can be explained in part by his cultural perfectionism. Huddleston puts his finger on the connection between this perfectionistic outlook and its impact on the notion of worth by pointing to the quotation with which we opened the present essay. In Part IX of *BGE* Nietzsche speaks of the presupposition of human



perfection. Huddleston reminds us that one of those presuppositions is the availability of an underclass “to render its achievement possible” (Huddleston 2014, 145), and he says that this is a recurring theme throughout Nietzsche’s writings.

Other commentators agree. Jeffrey Church, in an article entitled, “Nietzsche’s Early Perfectionism: A Cultural Reading of ‘The Greek State,’” says something very similar: “[in] most human cultures according to Nietzsche, ideals are generated by an aristocratic class that enjoins culture to self-transcendence” (Church 2015, 252). In connection with this theme Church asks, “What is the problem with the ethical idea of the ‘dignity of man’” (Church 2015, 252)? He answers that in Nietzsche’s judgment such ideals are antagonistic to the cultural self-transcendence towards which societies aim.

For Nietzsche, the problem with these optimistic ideals is that they give rise to an infinite longing for equality among human beings, a final condition in which all people equally recognize one another’s dignity. For Nietzsche, this infinite longing supplants our desire for excellence and transcendence. At the same time, these abstract liberal ideals point away from collective ethical goals and toward individual goals, toward the value of individuals over groups. The “dignity of man” presupposes that individuals’ worth precedes or stands apart from their function in any political or cultural community. As individuals internalize this abstract conception of humanity, they may “recognize the state only to the extent to which they conceive it to be in their own interest” and regard the state “as a means” to their own individual ends (*GS* 182–83). In other words, these abstract ethical ideals attenuate our connection to particular communities and hence throw us back upon our own “selfish” material aims. (Church 2015, 242)

If it is true that Nietzsche is a cultural perfectionist, and that, as Church suggests, most human cultures, according to Nietzsche, generate ideals that conduce to cultural self-transcendence, then it is not odd to find Nietzsche estranged from ideals that “point away from the collective,” or that attempt to define the individual worth in terms that abstract from his community.

Accordingly, we ought not be surprised if when Huddleston characterizes Nietzsche’s conception of human dignity it more closely accords with the ideals of a society

seeking its own transcendence than it might with the “attenuated” aims of the individual. With this broader social context in view Huddleston directs us to some of Nietzsche’s early writings in which he is first exploring the notion of human worth. One of the passages he quotes is from *The Greek State*:

Every man, with his whole activity, is only dignified to the extent that he is a tool of genius, consciously or unconsciously; whereupon we immediately deduce the ethical conclusion that “man as such,” absolute man, possesses neither dignity nor rights nor duties: only as a completely determined being, serving unconscious purposes, can man excuse his existence. (*GSt* 185)

Nietzsche is here asserting that an individual’s worth is not derived from the dignity that accrues to him as a human being, but rather from the service that he renders to genius or to an exemplary human being, or to society. Huddleston observes that Nietzsche’s assertions here are remarkable in several respects. In the first place Nietzsche is not merely offering an alternative or a complementary way to conceive of human dignity. Servitude, or more pointedly, becoming a tool for another’s use is the only means to acquire worth or dignity for most. He has foreclosed the Christian and Kantian conception of human worth. More than that, he has contravened them: “Nietzsche’s departure from the Christian and Kantian philosophical tradition surrounding dignity is here notable. Whereas this tradition would have it that being used as a mere means is incompatible with a person’s innate dignity, Nietzsche appears to be suggesting that being used as a means (maybe even a mere means) is how most can attain dignity” (Huddleston 2014, 150). Huddleston here is incorporating the notion referenced above that dignity is *earned* into the concept of service to an exemplar. He attempts to amalgamate these two notions in the following manner:

Nietzsche certainly thinks that the weak do seek comfortable safe lives – a choice rendered vivid in Nietzsche’s depiction of the “last man” in the Prologue of *Zarathustra*. But that is a far cry from thinking that *the best life* for them is of this sort. On the contrary, Nietzsche thinks that their highest

calling is a strenuous one that they will try to avoid. The best life is one of participation in, or in the service of, the cultural sphere, whether it be through promoting the lives of a few great individuals or in aiding the flourishing of the cultural whole. The best life for a weak person is in this respect not so different from the best life for a strong person. Both are called to a higher form of life. (Huddleston 2014, 141)

Secondly, and relatedly, Nietzsche seems to suggest that it is necessary for man to excuse or vindicate his very existence. How does this assertion square with the notion that man has no rights, no obligations? Huddleston ties these concepts together by referring to remarks that Nietzsche makes in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “for only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified” (*BT* 5). As Huddleston points out, for Nietzsche it is not having an immortal soul that justifies the human being’s existence, it is his completely-determined nature, his “whole activity” that will or will not provide him with an excuse to exist depending on whether that activity was directed toward the service of an exemplar (*GSt* 185).

Huddleston then traces a line from this early, seminal conception of human dignity in *GSt* to similar references in *BGE*, in which Nietzsche refers to the elite as the ultimate “justification” and “meaning” of the weak:

But what is essential in a good and healthy Aristocracy is that it [ its ruling-class] does *not* feel itself to be a function (be it of the monarchy or of the polity), but its *meaning* and highest justification – that it therefore accept in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who *for its sake* have to be oppressed and reduced to incomplete human beings, to slaves and instruments (*BGE* 258).

The passage from *GSt* asserts that all men derive their dignity and their justification for existence from the service they render to the great. The passage from *BGE* makes the same assertion but from the opposite direction; it states that the great lend dignity and worth to the lives of slaves and the oppressed by enjoining their service. The point Huddleston wishes to draw from the parallel is that the category “slaves and instruments” here, is equivalent to the category “every

man” there, and that Nietzsche’s reference to slaves and instruments is merely a reference to the majority: all those not numbered among the elite. In other words, the phrase “slaves and instruments” is functional in character, and not a literal reference to those in human bondage. Huddleston expresses the matter thus: “in using the extraordinarily provocative term ‘slavery,’ Nietzsche is among other things, seeking to remind his readers about the functional similarity between the role filled by the slaves in ancient Greece and Rome and the role filled by those who create the material and spiritual conditions that make cultural achievement possible more generally” (Huddleston 2014, 146). He wants to assert that Nietzsche takes the dignity of the non-elite to entail the non-elite’s enslavement in some sense or other, and that, in whatever sense the word *is* intended, “slavery” does not mean human bondage but some mode of service to an exemplar. Says Huddleston: “Nietzsche uses the term [slavery] to pick out the condition of those who in the following passage he goes on to describe as forming the ‘foundation and scaffolding’ (*BGE* 258) that makes for a culture of exceptional human excellence” (Huddleston 2014, 146).

The distinguishing feature of those included in this broad lower class is their ‘mediocrity.’ Huddleston is referencing here a passage from the *Antichrist* in which Nietzsche similarly refers to those who form the base of the social pyramid as uniformly mediocre. His point is that the sole source of meaning and dignity for the non-elite, owing to the paucity of his natural gifts, is to become the tool of genius. The paternalistic justification for the broad classifications of those who serve and those who rule on natural grounds is reminiscent of the justification offered by Aristotle for his conception of natural slavery: “For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient: from the hour of their birth, some men are marked out for subjection, others for rule... It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and just.”

(*Politics* 1.6). Though Huddleston is referring to slaves in the functional sense, like Aristotle he sees, or interprets Nietzsche as seeing, the slave's dignity as a function of his utility, and his service as a benefit to all concerned:

[Nietzsche's] idea, as I have said, is not simply that it is socially or culturally useful to have slaves, or useful to the privileged few to have slaves, but that the sort of slavery he is envisaging is actually in the best interest of the slaves themselves. While this view may be completely anathema to our moral sensibilities, it has certain affinities with the paternalistic views about slavery held by both Plato and Aristotle. Nietzsche builds on these views, but makes the notion of slavery *much more attenuated* and much less obviously political in import. (Huddleston 2014, 147-8; the italics are mine)

In suggesting that we conceive the notion of slavery Nietzsche is working with as “attenuated” in some sense, Huddleston is not implying that we take Nietzsche to be describing a sedentary way of life, by any means. He says in fact that such lives might well be perilous, painful, and distasteful; some may in fact perish. He gives an illustration of what he has in mind in the form of an imaginary account of an individual transformed by his sacrifice to culture. He tells the story of a minor merchant in fifteenth-century Florence who leads a quiet comfortable life selling odds and ends along a span of bridge above the Arno. At some point he becomes inspired by the great architect, Brunelleschi and by the towering grandeur of Brunelleschi's unfinished cathedral. He forsakes his own employ to join in the decades-long project to finish the dome. He suffers now; his life is much more difficult. “But he also has the sense that he's doing something important” (Huddleston 2014, 151). Huddleston's illustration is meant to convey the idea of an individual flourishing as the instrument of an exemplar.

Huddleston takes this as an illustration of what Nietzsche intended when referring to slaves as the “instruments” of the ruling-class: “a good and healthy aristocracy should not hesitate to accept in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who for its sake have to be

oppressed and reduced to incomplete human beings, to slaves and instruments” (*BGE* 258). What Huddleston is in fact suggesting is that any modern individual, without the loss of either rights or self-ownership, might fill the role previously played by a slave in advancing his culture.

Huddleston takes “slavery in some sense,” or, in an “attenuated” sense, to be merely analogous to the real thing.

Others to be sure share Huddleston’s read of the statements in *BGE* regarding an attenuated form of slavery. In the article by Church referenced above he says something very similar to Huddleston:

Nietzsche does not literally advocate slavery ... for the modern age, but rather sees “slavery” ... as [a] functional term that can be embodied in any number of empirical forms. Nietzsche claims that “slavery belongs to the essence of a culture [*Kultur*],” yet it is not clear what he means by “slavery.” In discussing the Greek state, he clearly means the political institution of slavery. However, he states in the first line of the essay that moderns behave in a “slave-like [*sklavisch*] manner” (*GSt* 176); slavery in modernity goes “under a more moderate name,” and in his later work he goes on to speak of slavery “in some sense” being necessary (*HH* 283; *GS* 18, 377; *BGE* 242, 257). Nietzsche contrasts the “naivete of the ancients in their distinction between the slaves and the free” with the moderns who are “prudish and refined, slavery is in our character” (*KSA* 7:3[44]). In all these passages, Nietzsche is suggesting that modern citizens may serve the function that the slaves played in the Greek world while still retaining legal rights. Such a reading is supported by Nietzsche’s expansive definition of a slave, which is any individual who devotes his or her life to the “struggle” for existence.” Under this definition, many individuals in a modern economy ... fit this description. (Church 2015, 242)

In these remarks from “A Cultural Reading of ‘*The Greek State*,’” Jeffrey Church is weighing in on one of the central debates surrounding Nietzsche’s perfectionism, the controversy between those who characterize Nietzsche’s perfectionism as democratic and those who regard it as aristocratic or elitist. While Church sees strains of egalitarianism in Nietzsche’s perfectionism, he dismisses out of hand the democratic reading as overly simplistic. And though he seems in the end inclined toward the aristocratic reading, he wants ultimately to move past this debate to say

something important about the social and political implications of his own reading of Nietzsche's perfectionism. His thesis is that, in "The Greek State," Nietzsche's aim is not to urge "a return to Greek institutional models," including slavery, but to point toward what he calls a "higher possibility for modern politics and culture" (Church 2015, 248).

In support of his thesis Church offers and develops three exegetical points from "The Greek State." The first point is that Nietzsche's focus in that work is on "liberal democratic ideals, not institutions." In his view Nietzsche's focus in his discussions of slavery is on the vestiges of the slavish mentality and mediocrity in the minds of moderns. "Slavery is in our character." His second point is that Nietzsche makes it clear that he considers slavery to be a reprehensible affair. And Church's third point is that Nietzsche appears to favor modern "functional alternatives" to the ancient institutions of slavery and war.

Church's first point, that Nietzsche is concerned much more with the character and implications of modern ideals than with modern politics, puts him at odds with the standard aristocratic interpretation that sees Nietzsche as celebrating the politics of violence either out of some aesthetic love of brutality or for its apparent resonance with the will to power. But Church interprets Nietzsche's remarks along these lines to reflect his belief that something like war, for instance, is "the only means of overcoming the atomistic individualism resulting from ... enlightenment ethical ideals." Nietzsche, in other words, sees war (or even the mere threat of war) as a better state of affairs than one which would enable the individual to ignore, absent such external pressure, the interests of the collective.

The standard aristocratic interpretation, as Church sees it, also has it that Nietzsche celebrates the political institution of slavery for much the same reasons its interpreters take him to celebrate war. However, Church observes that Nietzsche's attitude toward slavery was more

consonant with the way in which the Greeks ultimately regarded that institution: it “was for the Greeks a ‘terrible premise’; it aroused ‘shame,’ and it is a ‘truth’ that ‘gnaws at the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture.” That is to say, Nietzsche saw slavery as a “necessary evil” (Church 2015, 254)

Church’s final point is that Nietzsche’s assertion that slavery “belongs to the essence of culture” can be interpreted as something other than the claim that slavery in its ancient form is a necessary feature of modern culture. Nietzsche says in fact that in the modern age slavery is recognized “under a more moderate name.” Church seems to want to identify the “modern wage worker” as the functional counterpart to the slave in the *Ancien Regime*.

In the next section I will explore the difficulties I see with this interpretation (and with Huddleston’s) in some detail. However there are a few remarks that are worth noting here. The first is that, while it is easy to see how a modern slave could serve any number of the ends of a modern monetary society, Church fails to explain in what sense a modern wage worker can be taken to serve the ends of a cultural exemplar simply by virtue of his status as a “wage slave.” It seems just as likely that, by putting his finger on the fact that there are many in the modern age that are “enslaved by material necessity,” Nietzsche is merely noting that the modern, by failing to recognize his purpose in relation to the exemplar, not only misses his true calling but is materially little better off in the service of his selfish material ends than was his ancient Greek counterpart.

### 3 AN IMAGINED THROUGHLINE

Church’s remarks here and those of Huddleston we have examined so far both run aground on a *series* of interpretive errors. Both commentators see a particularly prominent *theme* running through many of Nietzsche’s earlier and later writings, through for instance, *GS* and



*UM* on one end, and *BGE* and *A* on the other. Because both Huddleston and Church regard this theme – the contribution of a servile underclass to the advancement of culture – as a throughline, both commentators interpret Nietzsche’s treatment of this theme in *BGE* in the light of what they take to be parallel treatments of it in the earlier and later writings. In fact, Huddleston claims that apart from some shifts in Nietzsche’s own subjective attitude toward the servitude in question, his objective characterizations of it “remain constant from his early essays (“The Greek State”) to his final works of 1888 (A 57)” (Huddleston 2014, 146).

The interpretive error embedded in the assumption of this supposed throughline is this: in *GSt* and in *A*, works that preceded and followed *BGE* respectively, Nietzsche’s focus is in fact *cultural flourishing*. But in *BGE*, Nietzsche’s central concern is not with culture, per se, but with the perfection of the human species. For in *BGE* Nietzsche consistently bypasses references to cultural perfection preferring instead references to human perfection, which he variously styles, “the enhancement of the type ‘man’” (*BGE* 257). This shift in focus was significant enough for Nietzsche to have remarked years after the publication of *BGE* that his treatment of the “type man” in *BGE* was a substantially more “spiritual and radical” account than any he’d attempted before or since (*EH* ‘Books: *BGE*’ 2). Just so, the mistake Huddleston and Church make is that they fail to appreciate the exceptionally “spiritual and radical” character of *BGE*.

Regarding the sense in which Nietzsche takes the account in *BGE* to be more “spiritual” than most, I will have more to say hereafter. But its radical character should already be clear from Nietzsche’s complete shift in emphasis in that work from culture to the human species. Some idea of what Nietzsche intended by “the perfection of the species” and its radical nature can be gotten from texts as early as “Schopenhauer as Educator:”

Humanity shall perpetually work at producing individual great men – this and no other is its task. How much one would like to apply a lesson to

society and its goals, a lesson that can be learned from the observation of any species in the animal or plant world, that is only concerned with the individual higher specimen, the more unusual, more powerful, more complicated and more fruitful specimen. (*SE* 6)

Nietzsche regards the perfection of the species as the development of the highest and rarest qualities of which humans are capable. Because he believes only a very rare few are capable of realizing this goal the perfection of the species focuses on the greatest possible realization of this goal in the rarest few. As an ethical goal it is radical in the sense that it involves a thoroughgoing shift in focus from a generally acceptable aim – the promotion of culture – to a much less frequently conceived goal of human good – promoting the welfare of the few: “He who is capable of raising himself to this further stage is struck first of all by how sparse and rare knowledge of this goal [the production of the genius] is, how universal, by contrast, cultural endeavor is and what an unspeakable amount of energy is expended on its service” (*SE* 6).

With regard then to the cultural reading, its first interpretive misstep was mistaking this radical account of *human perfection* in *BGE* for the more generic account of *cultural flourishing* elaborated in texts like *GSt* and *A*. And having made this initial error of treating these themes as though they were equivalent, Huddleston and Church make the further mistake of trading on their terms, of supposing Nietzsche’s references to those who must be treated as *less than human* in *BGE* could possibly refer, for instance, to the mistreatment of the doctors, accountants, and professors he alludes to in *GSt*. For so suggests Church:

Nietzsche is suggesting that modern citizens may serve the function that the slaves played in the Greek world while still retaining legal rights. Such a reading is supported by Nietzsche’s expansive definition of a slave, which is any individual who devotes his or her life to the ‘struggle for existence.’ (Church 2015, 242)

And so says Huddleston:

In using the extra ordinarily provocative term “slavery,” Nietzsche is, among other things, seeking to remind his readers about the functional similarity between the role filled by the slaves in ancient Greece and Rome and the role filled by those who create the material and spiritual conditions that make cultural achievement possible more generally. When he refers cagily to ‘slavery in some sense or other’ (*BGE* 257), Nietzsche uses the term to pick out the condition of those who, in the following passage, he goes on to describe as forming the ‘foundation and scaffolding [Unterbau und Gerüst]’ (*BGE* 258) that makes for a culture of exceptional human excellence. His discussion of this servile underclass of ‘mediocrity’ in *The Antichrist* suggests that he construes it very broadly indeed (57). It would appear to extend far beyond those who are the legally-sanctioned chattel of others ... Everyone from doctors to accountants to menial laborers and professors would seem to be included. (HH I.283) (Huddleston 2014, 146)

Huddleston’s claim here is that the reference to ‘slavery’ in *BGE* 257 is hyperbolic and merely points to the slave’s function as a servile promoter of culture, not necessarily to the slave’s status as chattel. Nietzsche authorizes this expanded conception of the term ‘slavery,’ as Huddleston sees it, by the use of the phrase, “slavery in some sense or other” in *BGE*. Huddleston wants to make the point that there are any number of grades and modes of servitude that are apt to promote cultural flourishing and that actual slavery is merely one of those modes. So, on this reading the reference to ‘slavery’ in the passage is primarily intended to be evocative of the servile nature of those that are called upon to advance culture.

The appeal of this interpretation is of course its firm grounding in the *other* texts these commentators reference to support it. My hesitation with this interpretation is two-fold. Firstly, these commentators tend to appeal primarily to texts external to *BGE* to establish it. Secondly, and relatedly, the claim that there are modes of servility less harsh than chattel slavery that are nevertheless still capable of promoting culture is, in fact, an assertion that Nietzsche makes. But it is irrelevant to the more radical claim he makes in *BGE*. For when Nietzsche says *in this volume*, that is, in *BGE*, that slavery is fundamental to any society in which the exceptional are driven to self-transcendence, the very best evidence we have that he is not speaking

hyperbolically is his own clear statement *in that volume* that he isn't. For in *this* publication at least, not only does he claim to be speaking from "the *other* end from all modern ideology," but from their very "antipodes," in fact (*BGE* 44). That is, not only does he wish to be understood as speaking in opposition to liberal conceptions of the categories he uses, but he wishes to be understood as speaking in extreme opposition to them. Just so, the radical sense in which we are expected to understand this claim must be derived from its immediate context, from its actual articulation in *BGE*, rather than from the texts to which the cultural interpreters mistakenly appeal for clarification.

Undoubtedly Huddleston would agree with me regarding the hermeneutical significance of context, but perhaps only to a degree. For in the passage from "Consecration to Culture" I quoted most recently above, Huddleston first says that Nietzsche clarifies what he intends by "slavery in some sense or other" (*BGE* 257) in the section following the one in which that phrase is found (Huddleston 2014, 146). There, in section 258, Nietzsche refers to slaves, the class of individuals in question, as the "foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of being" (*BGE* 258). But rather than referring in turn to the immediate context of *this* passage for clarification, i.e., the section in which *it* is found and the sections that precede and follow *it*, Huddleston defaults to another Nietzsche text for the needed illumination, namely *A*. That is, after appropriately identifying the slaves in *BGE* 257 with the "foundation and scaffolding" in *BGE* 258, Huddleston inappropriately (in my view) refers to what appears to him to be a parallel text in *A* for purposes of amplification. In a passage I have already quoted in part, Huddleston puts the matter thus,

[Nietzsche's] discussion of this servile underclass of mediocrity in *The Antichrist* suggests that he construes it very broadly indeed (*A* 57). It would appear to extend far beyond those who are the legally-sanctioned chattel of others, and it would appear to extend beyond even a proletariat working

class conventionally understood: “A high culture,” he writes in *The Antichrist*, “is a pyramid: it can stand only on a broad base; its first presupposition is a strong and soundly consolidated mediocrity. Handicraft, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greatest part of art, the whole quintessence of professional activity, to sum it up, is compatible only with a mediocre amount of ability and ambition” (A 57). (Huddleston 2014, 147)

In fairness, the *apparent* parallels between Nietzsche’s description of the underclass as a foundation and scaffolding in *BGE* 258, and his description of it in *A* as the broad base of a pyramid, are striking. But there are sufficient indications in both of these texts (*BGE* and *A*) to suggest they are describing two *distinct relations* between the underclass and the elite. In *BGE* Nietzsche, as before mentioned, never refers to culture, per se. His descriptions there consistently relate an underclass to exceptional individuals self-absorbed in their own individual enterprises of self-transcendence. Whereas in *A*, *UM* and *GSt*, all of which the cultural interpreters reference as proof-texts, Nietzsche is almost always describing an entire social structure in which two classes of people are more or less ideally related in their pursuit of common cultural enterprises.

In addition to these descriptive discrepancies between *BGE* and the other textual accounts, there are, particularly in the first three sections of *BGE* Part IX, internally consistent descriptions of the true relation in question that are so distinct in character and content from Nietzsche’s earlier writings, that they erase any possibility of the throughline insisted on by the cultural theorists. As suggested earlier, the radical character of the precondition we are discussing, i.e., the real significance of the relation described between the underclass and the elite, is a function of the radical principles Nietzsche develops in *BGE*. Of particular interest to the present discussion is the genetic account developed in the first three sections of the book’s concluding chapter, in which Nietzsche unearths the origins of the type of society he sees as most favorable to the advancement of the species. By excavating the structural origin of one particular type of society, which he identifies as an aristocracy, he claims to unearth along with it

a crucial “presupposition” or precondition for the advancement of the human type as a whole. That this is his intent is clear from the following remark in *BGE* 257: “[to] be sure, one should not yield to humanitarian illusions about the origins of an aristocratic society (and thus of the presupposition of this enhancement of the type ‘man’): the truth is hard.” The clear implication here is that the factors that lead to the formation of aristocracies *just are*, as Nietzsche sees it, preconditions for the advancement of the species.

Nietzsche’s reference here to *the* presupposition of human perfection will in fact reveal itself to be a reference to a *cluster* of preconditions. Let’s look, then, at the structural origin of aristocratic societies as described by Nietzsche to see what it tells us about the preconditions in question. In the last paragraph of *BGE* 257 he describes the typical development of an aristocracy as follows:

Human beings whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey who were still in possession of unbroken strength of will and lust for power, hurled themselves upon weaker, more civilized more peaceful races, perhaps traders or cattle raisers, or upon mellow old cultures whose last vitality was even then flaring up in splendid fireworks of spirit and corruption. (*BGE* 257)

Nietzsche suggests that aristocratic societies typically arise as the product of violent wholesale assaults perpetrated by one people on another. He describes the perpetrators of these assaults as men who were still natural in the sense that their own societies had as yet not blunted their natural passions, nor broken their wills for preeminence. But more importantly for our purposes, in the third section of *BGE* Part IX, in addition to describing their *dispositions* as natural, he also describes their *behavior* as natural, in the sense that it accorded with what he calls “the will of life”: “life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien, and weaker, suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at its mildest, exploitation ...” (*BGE* 259).

Nietzsche gives a strikingly similar account of the origins of aristocratic societies in *GM*, which was published just after *BGE* and which he refers to as a “supplement and clarification” of the earlier work. In section 17 of the second essay, Nietzsche describes “how the ‘state’ began on earth” in the following terms:

the welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless populace into a firm form was not only instituted by an act of violence but was also carried to its conclusion by nothing but acts of violence – that the oldest “state” thus appeared as a fearful tyranny, as an oppressive and remorseless machine, and went on working until this raw material of people and semi-animals was at last not only thoroughly kneaded and pliant but also *formed*. I employed the word “state”: it is obvious what is meant – some pack of blonde beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race which, organized for war and with the ability to organize, unhesitatingly laid its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad. That is after all how the “state” began on earth. (*GM* 2:17)

Like the earlier narrative in *BGE*, this later account describes nascent aristocracies as the products of violent cataclysms. They are tyrannies set in motion and sustained by pitiless oppression. What is more, just as he does in the earlier account, he characterizes the violent and tyrannical behavior of these conquerors as natural in the sense that it is instinctual: “Their work is an instinctive creation and imposition of forms: they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are” (*GM* 2:17). But even more significantly for our purposes, Nietzsche tells us that the end product of such wholesale rapine is “a ruling structure that *lives*” (*GM* 2:17). It has parts whose functions are organically assigned to them by the organizing principle inherent in the nature of the master race. And in the earlier work he refers to this organizing principle as “the essence of what lives;” it is “a basic organic function;” and its results are “a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life” (*BGE* 259).

Nietzsche, then, characterizes the kinds of acts that produce aristocracies as consonant with and springing from “the essence of what lives.” And in identifying the free expression of

the will of life as crucial to the origin of an aristocracy, he has simultaneously put his finger on a crucial factor, a presupposition, for the advancement of the species, namely, behavior expressive of the will of life.

Although my purpose here is to provide a close reading of the preconditions for human enhancement that Nietzsche develops in *BGE* in particular, his radical treatment of this theme is not without precedent in his earlier works. In *The Gay Science*, for instance, he characterizes the free expression of the will of life in human interactions as a virulent form of vitalism in constant dialectical tension with the tendency of “all ordered society [to put] the passions to sleep” (*GS* 4). And he poses then answers the question, “*What preserves the species?*” The strongest and most evil spirits have so far advanced humanity the most. They have always rekindled the drowsing passions ...” (*GS* 4).

In this passage Nietzsche’s attention is on the *ebb and flow* of human advancement as the influence of the vitalism he describes there waxes and wanes. But in *BGE* he is concerned with the *institutionalization* of the kind of behavior expressive of the will to life, in a word, exploitation: “life itself is essentially approbation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation...” (*BGE* 259). According to Nietzsche, then, nascent aristocracies were formed by institutionalizing, i.e., normalizing exploitation. For, the sustained and consistent practice of this form of vitalism could only obtain in a society in which its expression has been normalized. In *BGE*, he makes exactly this point. He describes these exploitive practices as something that has become “ingrained” in these societies. Individuals are “kept down,” kept at a distance; obedience and command are *constantly practiced*, and if an aristocracy is healthy, such things will be done “in good conscience” (*BGE* 257,258).



Here, then, Nietzsche has put his finger on another factor at play in the formation of aristocracies, namely the normalization of behavior expressive of the will to life, that is, the normalization of exploitative practices. However, in order to explain the sense in which this normalization is a condition of human enhancement I need to say something about the psychological state that Nietzsche associates with the imposition of these norms. Let's look at the full passage I quoted in part earlier, in which Nietzsche describes the process of this normalization:

Without that pathos of distance which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata – when the ruling caste constantly looks afar and looks down upon subjects and instruments and just as constantly practices obedience and command, keeping down and keeping at a distance – that other more mysterious pathos could not have grown up either – the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of an ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states – in brief, simply the enhancement of the “type-man,” the continual “self-overcoming of man,” to use a moral formula in a supra-moral sense. (*BGE*, 257)

According to Nietzsche the instinctual and habitual imposition of exploitative norms is the outward expression of a profound psychological state in the minds of the high-stationed. Nietzsche refers to this affective state as the “pathos of distance” (*BGE*, 257). It is described here as the state of mind of those who constantly look “down and afar” upon the weak and treat them as “subjects and instruments.” But more to the point for our purposes, the pathos of distance is a self-reflective state of mind. It is a kind of self-reverence. It is an egoism that could suggest to itself without irony “that to a being such as ‘we are’ other beings must be subordinate by nature” (*BGE* 265).

Nietzsche amplifies this self-reflective, self-reverential character of the pathos of distance in *GM*: “it was the good themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed, and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of first

rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebian. It was out of this pathos of distance that they first seized the right to create values ...” (*GM* I: 2). It is his pronounced and sustained sense of self-approval over and against his contempt for the lowly, that stirs the higher type to take to himself the prerogative to mint new values.

In this passage and in *BGE* 257 Nietzsche is specifically alluding to the very earliest instances of value creation, values that resulted in the first master moralities. But if this pathos enables the higher type to create values it also allows him to confront and challenge opposing value systems. This was the point of the passage I referenced above (*GS* 4), in which Nietzsche attributes the value-creating urge to the “strongest and most evil spirits” throughout as well as at the start of human history. In that passage he identifies this value-creating urge with human progress itself. For, the explanation given there for why the “strongest and most evil spirits” have done the most for the species, is that their *strength of soul* enables them to challenge the status quo, especially with respect to entrenched values and ideals. The full passage reads as follows: “They [the strongest and most evil spirits] have always reawakened the sense of comparison, of contradiction, of joy in the new, the daring and the untried; they force men to meet opinion with opinion, model with model. For the most part by arms, by the overthrow of boundary stones, and by offense to the pieties but also by new religions and moralities” (*GS* 4).

Nietzsche’s point here is that the strength required to problematize, to call into question unconscious assumptions, to send thought into entirely new directions and the mind toward the contemplation of new paradigms, is rare, and to do all this in a manner that is ongoing and life-affirming, is rarer still. *BGE* 257, in fact, asserts that this requisite strength of soul is peculiar to certain societies. And these propensities are of the same description as those that in *BGE* Nietzsche claims are conditioned by the normalization of exploitation. I refer here to what

Nietzsche called “that other mysterious pathos” inspired by the pathos of distance. It is “the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further stretching, more comprehensive states,” All these proclivities are productive of “the continual self-overcoming of man ...” (BGE 257).

To recapitulate, my aim in this part of the paper is to show that, on the view that Nietzsche holds in BGE, the normalization of exploitation *is* a condition of human enhancement. I believe I have demonstrated as much by showing that, in Nietzsche’s view, this normalization engenders a psychological state in the high-stationed that is peculiarly and powerfully conducive to human progress. I also suggested, more broadly, that the cultural reading underappreciates Nietzsche’s radical characterizations of the precondition for human enhancement by equating them with his mitigated characterizations of the conditions of cultural flourishing. Nietzsche characterizes the conditions of human enhancement as compulsory and ingrained; the cultural theorist interpret the conditions of cultural flourishing as voluntary or circumstantial. But there is another important aspect of the presupposition in question that I merely touched on earlier, namely, its highly spiritual character. A closer look at this dimension of the presupposition of human enhancement will, I believe, further serve to foreclose the possibility that Nietzsche’s treatment of this presupposition could be read in the “attenuated sense” in which the cultural theorists understand it.

In *EH*, Nietzsche suggests the passages from *BGE* which we have taken for our texts, if not that volume in its entirety, are best understood in spiritual terms:

This book (1886) [*BGE*] is in all essentials a *critique of modernity*, not excluding the modern sciences, modern arts, and even modern politics, along with pointers to a contrary type that is as little modern as possible – a noble, Yes-saying type. In the latter sense, the book is a school for the *gentilhomme*, taking this concept in a more spiritual and radical sense than has ever been done. (*EH* ‘Books: *BGE*’ 2)

Nietzsche's reference in *EH* to the spiritual (and radical) character of *BGE* apply, of course, to the book as a whole. However, clearly it has peculiar application to *BGE IX* from which we have drawn our proof-texts. For he makes especial mention of, and explicitly offers "a pointer to," the noble type portrayed in *BGE IX*, which is entitled, "What is Noble?" (*EH* 'Books: *BGE*' 2). That we can still more narrowly focus Nietzsche's "spiritual" ascription to the noble himself is also clear. For in our passage from *EH* Nietzsche says that his treatment of the noble type in *BGE* was intended as a school for this person-type. But if it was a school, it was intended not so much to teach the higher-type what to do or how to behave, but to teach him how to recognize himself as such. For he describes the project of *BGE* as part of "the slow search for those related to me" (*EH* 'Books *BGE*' 1).

It is easiest to recognize this spiritual dimension of Nietzsche's treatment of the conditions for human enhancement when it is contrasted with the way in which the cultural interpreters characterize these conditions. Recall that Jefferey Church takes these preconditions to involve no more than a functional relationship between the higher and lower types of individuals. I will quote at length here a passage I referenced in part earlier:

Nietzsche does not literally advocate slavery for the modern age but rather sees slavery as a functional term that can be embodied in any number of empirical forms. Nietzsche claims that slavery belongs to the essence of culture [*kulture*], yet it is not clear what he means by 'slavery.' In discussing the Greek state he clearly means the political institution of slavery. However, he states in the first line of the essay that moderns behave in a "slave-like [sklavisch] manner" (*GSt* 176); slavery in modernity goes "under a more moderate name," and in his later work he goes on to speak of slavery "in some sense" being necessary (*HH* 283; *GS* 18,277; *BGE* 242, 257). In all these passages, Nietzsche is suggesting that modern citizens may serve the function that slaves played in the Greek world, while still retaining their legal rights. Such a reading is supported by Nietzsche's expansive definition of a slave, which is any individual who devotes his or her life to the struggle for existence. (Church 2015, 254)

The contributions of the underclass on this reading are material rather than spiritual in nature. Since these individuals are unable to surmount their own material necessity, their contributions to society must remain strictly material – that is, they provide the supports for those who are able in fact to rise above the level of having to provide for themselves materially. These latter are then free to apply themselves to cultural pursuits. The benefit to the privileged class is strictly material in the sense that they have the freedom, time, and energy for such pursuits that they otherwise would not have been able to enjoy.

Before returning to Huddleston's description of the precondition for human flourishing, I will briefly respond to Church. Apart from the observations I made earlier regarding the improper use of texts outside of *BGE* to amplify Nietzsche's descriptions of the presupposition discussed within that text, I offer just two remarks. The first is that while this material benefit to the privileged class could be viewed as a *contributory* condition for cultural or even human perfection, it is so far from being the *principal* condition for either that Nietzsche never once mentions it in *BGE*. Church is reading this material benefit *into* that text. The other remark is that by Church's reasoning, *wealth* by itself would serve as a cleaner fuel for driving human perfection than any form of slavery ever could, ancient or modern. If the sole or even the main benefit the underclass provide the elite were freedom, wealth would be the true precondition for human perfection. Yet Nietzsche never mentions it in *BGE* in the context of this discussion.

Andrew Huddleston's picture of the presupposition for human flourishing is somewhat more nuanced than Church's depiction of it. Huddleston sees it as a cooperation between the elite and the non-elite in which both classes of individuals ideally sacrifice their lives to promote culture. He describes it as follows:

Talents of course vary widely, and, accordingly, what one can sensibly be expected to contribute to the perfectionistic enterprise of culture varies widely as well. Most, on Nietzsche's view will be incapable of writing masterful string trios. In this belief Nietzsche is deeply elitist. But nonetheless he also thinks a higher form of life *is* open to the ordinary person, and that is one in which they aid in the flourishing of intellectual and artistic excellence – whether lugging the stones to build the cathedral or even more indirectly, creating the material and (just as importantly) the spiritual conditions that permit the leisured class the chance to participate more directly in endeavors of the spirit. (Huddleston 2014, 142)

As already noted, Huddleston (like Church) mistakenly equates Nietzsche's treatment of human perfection with cultural flourishing, as evidenced in his comments immediately following the quote above, in which he suggests that the "topic of the collective project of culture" was "one that had been percolating since his [Nietzsche's] early essay, 'The Greek State,' and it is one we continue to see reverberate all the way through to his final works of 1888" (Huddleston 2014, 142). And there are other similarities between Huddleston's account and Church's. For, like Church, Huddleston sees the contribution of the non-elite as chiefly material, in the sense that their labor relieves the elite from the necessity of providing for his own material necessities. And to the extent that Huddleston does refer to them in the quote immediately above, the spiritual dividends he references there are cultural in nature. They are not the psychical benefits Nietzsche consistently references throughout *BGE*. Huddleston helpfully provides illustrations of what he regards as the material nature of this precondition. He refers, in an illustration quoted earlier, to the individual who lugs the stones used to build a cathedral, and elsewhere to a slave building the pyramids, and to some peon sweeping Beethoven's floor.

None of these characterizations or illustrations, however, reflect the highly spiritual, psychical character of the presupposition Nietzsche articulates in *BGE*. For, once more, the sense in which Nietzsche takes human perfection to presuppose the subjugation of an underclass must ultimately be understood in spiritual terms. He sees human perfection as the

function of “the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the *soul*” (*BGE* 257). And this craving is itself a function of a certain psychical state that he calls the *pathos* of distance. Nietzsche describes this *pathos* as “the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order” (*GM* I:2).

This particular description of the *pathos* of distance surfaces in the context of Nietzsche’s account of the origin of the concept ‘good’. His account refutes a competing account put forward by the English moralists. According to Nietzsche, these historians of morality claimed the judgment ‘good’ originated from “those to whom ‘goodness’ was shown” (*GM* I:2). But Nietzsche claims to the contrary that the concept ‘good’ arose out of the psychical state experienced by the ruling class who “felt” their own persons and actions were good, particularly in relation to their feelings about the persons and actions of the lowly.

But it is particularly the respective *intensities* of the feelings described in these competing accounts on which I wish to focus our attention. One reason Nietzsche gives for rejecting the opposing account for the origin of the concept of good is that the feeling a person gets when she is the object of egoless acts is situational and fleeting. Such feelings lack the duration and intensity required to account for the habitual association of the selfless act with the judgment that the act was good. But the feeling the ruling class experienced when evaluating themselves and their actions in relation to the lowly was, according to Nietzsche, protracted, forceful, and essential. It was the *intensity* of this psychical state, which Nietzsche described as a wellspring of total feeling, that emboldened the noble class to seize the prerogative to judge what was and was not good. And what Nietzsche described as the “craving for still greater distances within the soul itself” (*BGE* 257) was in effect the natural urge to further intensify this already rarified state of mind. In effect, the higher type’s craving to *close the distance* between what he is and what he is

ultimately capable of becoming is *itself* a function of the desire to *widen the distance* between himself and the subjugated: “Without that pathos of distance which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata [...] that other, more mysterious pathos could not have grown up either – the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself ...” (BGE 257).

The high-stationed develop the craving for these higher and more comprehensive states of human potential out of the pathos of distance, the psychological state that facilitates the normalization of exploitation. And the normalization of exploitation is the practice of keeping down, holding at a distance, constantly practicing obedience and command. It is patently something that higher type does *to* the lower type, not something the lower type does *for* the higher type. It wasn’t, then, a floor sweeper that Beethoven needed, as Huddleston suggests; he needed a whipping-boy. It isn’t, in other words, the material advantage of not having to clean one’s own abode that occasions the greatness of such individuals or that drives their self-transcendence, but the craving for greater growth, the pathos, that is itself a function of the pathos of distance. This is not the *prescription* for modernity that Hitler’s national socialists took it to be any more than it is a defense for wanton exploitation. It is a *description* of the underlying principles or *pathē* involved in the “enhancement of the type ‘man.’” (BGE 257).

It is clear that the cultural theorists are concerned that when texts like this are taken at face value, Nietzsche comes across as a promoter of needless exploitation. As I mentioned at the outset, Huddleston refers to the ‘face value’ interpretation of texts like this as their “natural reading,” and suggests that when Nietzsche is read in this way he appears to “praise a world in which a small elite enhances itself through the subjugation of the rest of mankind, who bear this yoke of servitude and get nothing in return” (Huddleston 2014, 135). Ironically, however, Nietzsche is just as aware as the cultural theorists are of the immorality this formulation presents



on its face. But Nietzsche's approach to this apparent difficulty diverges sharply from the cultural theorists' approach to it.

The cultural theorists "redress" the apparent immorality of Nietzsche's formulation by recasting the role of the underclass as voluntary and self-sacrificial, and by excising from the concept of Nietzsche's elitism any notion of rapine. Their reading might roughly be summarized as follows. Nietzsche advocates an aristocratic social structure in which the weak attain dignity, value, and meaning by becoming the tools of exemplars, or by consecrating themselves to culture. Church and Huddleston concur in this and conclude that the office formerly served by literal slaves – that of providing the framework upon which higher types ascend – is just as capably served by the weak and mediocre in general, but without the sacrifice of their rights or self-ownership. The exploitation that Nietzsche styles 'slavery,' then, is slavery mostly by analogy. It involves none of the heinous oppression and abuse that we might identify with, say, the slavery of ancient Greece or Rome. It may be brutal, perilous and demeaning; it may even be involuntary in some regards. But this would be the extreme lower limit of what a modern could render to culture. And though it offends our sensibilities in some respects, it never sinks below that point at which we may no longer conceive it to be a source of meaning and dignity for those who submit to it.

Nietzsche too betrays, at times, concern about the seeming immorality of his formulation of the project of human perfection. But his attempt to redress the apparent difficulty amounts to no more than the few succinct rhetorical gestures he makes in an attempt to dismiss it. For instance, after describing man's ongoing project of self-transcendence as a function of exploitative norms, he caps that passage (*BGE* 257) with the remark that the seemingly immoral formulation he'd just used should be taken in a supra-moral sense. But he goes on to at least

admit to a dilemma. The project he describes aims at the perfection of the species through a process that involves behavior expressive of the life-drive. These modes of behavior include “appropriation, injury, and the overpowering of what is alien” at one end of the spectrum and exploitation at other. But while Nietzsche sees such behavior as supra-moral, in the sense that it is conditioned by the amoral life-drive, he needs at the same time to acknowledge the obviously libelous aspect of the language he’s confined to in characterizing it. His dilemma, in other words, is this. While he acknowledges the fact that he describes man’s self-overcoming using “a moral formula in a supra-moral sense,” he appears to have no answer to the question he seems to ask himself: “why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages” (*BGE* 259)?

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The dilemma of Nietzsche’s moral formula of the preconditions of human perfection that he wishes to be understood in a supra-moral sense brings us back to our opening remarks. The reason why we must take his description of these preconditions in the radical sense in which they are presented, rather than in the attenuated sense that Huddleston and Church suggest relates back to the conceptual watershed defined by this dilemma. The thematic treatment of the perfection of the species (as opposed to culture) necessitates a discussion of the more radical theme of the life-drive, which is necessarily amoral, but leaves Nietzsche limited to the same ethically infused vernacular he’d previously used to discuss the preconditions of cultural progress. Additionally, Nietzsche clearly anticipated the interpretive missteps responsible for the cultural reading, as evidenced by remarks that seemed designed to preempt it. He says, as severally noted, not only that he intended that his formulations be taken in a supra-moral sense,

but also in an exceptionally radical sense. If there is any lingering confusion perhaps it is owing to the fact that Nietzsche appears to miss the beasts.

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