Nietzsche’s virtues:

Curiosity, courage, pathos of distance, sense of humor, and solitude

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The contours of Nietzsche’s socio-moral framework are idiosyncratic when compared to contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. It might seem strange to say that Nietzsche was a virtue theorist at all. He says some nasty things about virtue. In *The Gay Science* 21, he claims that “virtues (like industriousness, obedience, chastity, filial piety, and justice) are usually harmful for those who possess them [….] When you have a virtue, a real, whole virtue,” he says, “you are its *victim*.” In *Antichrist* 1, he objects to the “virtuous filth of the modern yes and no” and considers it “better to live on the ice than among modern virtues.” And in *Ecce Homo* Destiny 4, he writes, “I negate the type of man that has so far been considered supreme: the good, the benevolent, the beneficent.” This is why some commentators have questioned whether he has a virtue theory at all (Berry 2015).

 Others, however, have noted that Nietzsche praises epistemic virtues such as curiosity (Harper 2015, Jenkins 2016, Reginster 2013, White 2001). The core concepts of his framework have more in common with Mengzi’s (Olberding 2012) innate “sprouts” of virtue than anything we find in Aristotle — even the grandiose Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsychia* (Magnus 1980). Even more so, Nietzsche opposes the universalism of Christian conceptions of virtue. He celebrates instead “virtue in the style of the Renaissance, *virtù*, moraline-free virtue” (*Antichrist* 2).

Nietzsche starts with a naturalistic conception of drives, instincts, and types of people. He then moves in a normative direction by identifying some drives and instincts as virtues — at least for certain types of people in particular social and cultural contexts. Much of Nietzsche’s understanding of virtue must therefore be understood relative to a type of person and the context in which they find themselves. For instance, in *The Gay Science* 120, Nietzsche revises the dictum “virtue is the health of the soul” to “*your* virtue is the health of *your* soul.” And in *Antichrist* 11, he uses derisive scare quotes to distinguish between type-appropriate and type-inappropriate dispositions:

A virtue needs to be our *own* invention, our *own* most personal need and self-defense: in any other sense, a virtue is just dangerous. Whatever is not a condition for life *harms* it: a virtue that comes exclusively from a feeling of respect for the concept of ‘virtue’, as Kant would have it, is harmful.

Nietzsche pays special attention to his own type in his own context, emphasizing the virtues of curiosity, courage, the pathos of distance, the sense of humor, and solitude. These instincts-become-virtues are held together by conscience and integrity, as I explain in more detail below.

For Nietzsche, drives are act-directed motivational and evaluative dispositions (Katsafanas 2016). An agent’s drives move her to engage in and positively evaluate a range of characteristic actions regardless of the consequences that may eventuate from those actions. Drives thus differ from preferences and desires in being associated primarily with the processes of agency rather than with teleologically-specified states of affairs. Passages about aggressive drives in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the *Genealogy* illustrate this idea. He claims that these drives do not disappear during the political shift into the “straitjacket” of norms and rules; instead, the drives remain but end up expressing themselves differently (*Genealogy* II.2). “After the structure of society is fixed on the whole and seems secure against external dangers,” he claims, “strong and dangerous drives, like an enterprising spirit, foolhardiness, vengefulness, craftiness, rapacity, and the lust to rule, which had so far not merely been honored insofar as they were socially useful […] but had to be trained and cultivated […] are now experienced as dangers” (BGE 201). Indeed, they are “doubly dangerous, since the channels to divert them are lacking.” The supposition here is that aggressive drives, lacking an opportunity for discharge in action against an external enemy, will be “diverted” from their usual “channels” onto members of the society. Here we see a drive finding expression in alternative ways (same action-type, different goal and consequence) when the most natural manner of expression is no longer available. Nietzsche makes a similar claim about aggressive drives in *Genealogy* II.16: with the establishment of a strictly-regulated society, he says,

suddenly all [people’s] instincts were disvalued and ‘suspended.’ […] in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: […] at the same time the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands! Only it was hardly or rarely possible to humor them: as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications.

This susceptibility to displacement from usual “channels” is one of the main reasons why drive-motivated actions sometime seem irrational. This feature of drives explains and unites a range of seemingly irrational behaviors in which an agent performs an action that is drive-expressive despite the fact that she knows or could easily come to know that the action will not produce a desired state of affairs.

In addition, Nietzsche thinks that instincts are innate drives, though other drives can be acquired. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 3, he claims that “by far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among instinctive activities, and that goes even for philosophical thinking. We have to relearn here, as one has had to relearn about heredity and what is ‘innate.’” And in *Beyond Good and Evil* 199, Nietzsche argues that “The strange limits of human development, the way it hesitates, takes so long, often turns back, and moves in circles, is due to the fact that the herd instinct of obedience is inherited best, and at the expense of the art of commanding.” In two additional passages, he refers to the process of breeding (‘*züchten*’ or a cognates) when talking about instincts. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 207, he contrasts the “*ideal* scholar in whom the scientific instinct, after thousands of total and semi-failures, for once blossoms and blooms to the end” with the “*philosopher,*” whom he characterizes as a “Caesarian breeder and brutal man of culture” who uses the scholar as a tool. And in *Genealogy of Morals* II.3, Nietzsche argues that “one has only to look at [Germans’] former codes of punishments to understand what effort it cost on this earth to breed a ‘nation of thinkers’ [….] These Germans have employed fearful means to acquire a memory, so as to master their basic mob-instinct.” These passages stand in opposition to passages such as *Uses and Disadvantages of History For Life* 4, *Daybreak* 38, and *Daybreak* 455, in which Nietzsche talks about drives and other dispositions in terms of an acquired second nature (‘*zweite Natur*’).

Moreover, instincts and other drives are mutable on several dimensions, including their intensity, their objects, and the structural interrelations (*Daybreak* 109). And an agent’s instincts and other drives constitute her psychological type. *Daybreak* 199 is especially instructive on this point:

However far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of drives which constitute his being. He can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counterplay among one another, and above all the laws of their nutriment remain wholly unknown to him. This nutriment is therefore a work of chance.

This passage establishes what Nietzsche thinks is determinative of a person’s type: your type is the “totality of drives” that “constitute” your “being.” Your type is not dependent on your beliefs, your culture, or any of a variety of other candidates. What makes you who you are is the constellation of your drives.

This in turn makes it possible to say what a Nietzschean virtue is: namely, a well-calibrated instinct or other drive. What it takes for a drive to be well-calibrated involves both internal and external (social) integration, or at least non-interference. In particular, a drive is a virtue to the extent that it is conducive to life, does not systematically or reliably induce negative self-directed emotions that respond to fixed aspects of the self, and does not systematically or reliably induce reactions from the agent’s community that are liable to be internalized as negative self-directed emotions that respond to fixed aspects of the self. The first and second constraints together are what I call “internal integration” (Alfano forthcoming). One drive is integrated with another when expressing it typically also expresses the other (strong integration) or at least does not frustrate the expression of the other (weak integration). Since drives induce not only characteristic patterns of action but also characteristic patterns of evaluation, integrated drives will tend to result in actions that the agent approves of or at least is not disposed to disapprove. Failures to enjoy internal integration Nietzsche calls “decadence” (*Ecce Homo* Destiny 7), which he sees as a vicious state of overall character. In *Daybreak* 26, he argues that, “The beginnings of justice, as of prudence, moderation, bravery — in short, of all we designate as the *Socratic virtues*, are *animal*: a consequence of that drive which teaches us to seek food and elude enemies.” Virtues are here consequences of drives. Their instinctual adaptiveness (in pursuit of the nutrition and security that foster life and health) makes them virtues. Likewise, in *Beyond Good and Evil* 262, Nietzsche argues that communities “call virtues” whatever instincts and other drives have enabled them to survive and triumph. Such adaptiveness is one aspect of what I mean by a drive’s being well-calibrated.

I call the third constraint “external integration.” Like internal integration, external integration can be strong (the agent’s community tends to approve of her actions and the drives that motivate them) or weak (the agent’s community is not disposed to disapprove of her actions and the drives that motivate them). This constraint is especially clear in the case of the criminal type (*Verbrecher*). For Nietzsche, the criminal belongs to a type that, in a different context, might flourish as a hero. But the criminal finds himself in a situation where expressing his drives is almost certain to be disastrous. For instance, in *Daybreak* 202, Nietzsche says that the criminal suffers from “a burdensome *tyrannical drive*” which could potentially be cured via “extinction, transformation, [or] sublimation.” Likewise, in *Zarathustra* Tree, the young man feels like a criminal because his drives are condemned by his community. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 30, Nietzsche claims that the “highest insights” of higher types “must — and should! — sound like stupidities, or possibly crimes, when they come without permission to people whose ears have no affinity for them and were not predestined for them.” Most decisively, in *Twilight of the Idols* Skirmishes.45, we read:

The criminal type, this is a strong type of person under unfavorable conditions, a strong person made ill. He needs a wilderness, a nature and form of existence that is somehow freer and more dangerous; this is where all the arms and armor of a strong person’s instincts *rightfully belong*. His *virtues* are ostracized by society; his liveliest drives quickly fuse with depressive affects, with suspicion, fear, dishonor. If we generalize from the case of the criminal: we can imagine beings who, for some reason, lack public approval, who know that they are not seen as beneficial or useful, – that Chandala feeling that you are not seen as equal but as excluded, unworthy, polluted. All creatures like this have a subterranean hue to their thoughts and actions. […] All innovators of the spirit have at some point had that pale and fatalistic sign of the Chandala on their foreheads: *not* because they were seen this way, but rather because they themselves felt a terrible gap separating them from everything conventional and honorable.

Someone disposed to aggression will end up thinking, feeling, and acting very differently depending on whether he is considered a hero or a criminal. The valence and content of the labels applied to a person, together with the power-relation between the labeler and labeled, interact with his preexisting psychological dispositions to produce the kind of person he eventually becomes.Since types are constellations of drives, different virtues are fitting for people who belong to different types. In many cases, just a few virtues will best fit a given type. If this is right, then Nietzsche held a *type-relative unity of virtue thesis* (Alfano 2015a).

In addition, Nietzsche was an exemplarist about virtue. Exemplarism has a long history in both Christian philosophy (emerging especially in Augustine, on which see Kondoleon 1970) and Chinese philosophy (most notably in Confucianism, on which see Olberding 2012). In both traditions, the basic idea is to start not with abstract principles that guide the cultivation and expression of virtue, but with admired individuals, whom one imitates or emulates. In the Christian tradition on which Zagzebski’s (2017) exemplarism is based, the prime exemplar is God. Becoming divine may seem like a tall order, so this version of exemplarism comes with a bridge: the incarnation of Jesus Christ. While emulating the disembodied Father may be intimidating, modeling oneself on the embodied Son is expected to be less daunting. In this model, one begins by admiring the exemplar. Admiration, if it survives reflective scrutiny, motivates the admirer both to understand better the psychic economy of the exemplar and to emulate the exemplar’s inner and outer life.

Nietzsche’s exemplarism is more complex. His first engagement with and rejection of admiration-emulation exemplarism is in *The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874 / 1997). In this essay, he distinguishes three approaches to history and historical exemplars: monumental, antiquarian, and critical. These approaches are distinguished by their galvanizing emotions and sentiments, which relate to their aims. Monumental history emerges from admiration (of the exemplar) and collective pride (in belonging to the same community as the exemplar). When we practice monumental history, we lionize and emulate exemplars. Antiquarian history springs from nostalgia for the times and practices associated with past exemplars. When we practice antiquarian history, we preserve the past because it is our own. Critical history surveys past exemplars with a skeptical eye. When we practice critical history, we clear the brush: anything unworthy ends up on the trash heap.

Nietzsche recognizes the value of each of these approaches to the past, but he also rejects all three. I won’t rehearse the problems with the antiquarian or critical orientations here (for more, see Jensen 2016), but it is worthwhile to see why he rejects monumental history. According to Nietzsche, one of the main advantages of monumental history is also one of its fatal flaws: monumentalized exemplars inspire us to imitate them (*History for Life* 2). They also give us the confidence that what they’ve done is possible (after all, actual implies possible). Nietzsche argues, though, that they function as boundary-markers: yes, it is possible to follow in the footsteps of exemplars, but it is (or seems) impossible to go one step further. This is a theme Nietzsche explores in *Daybreak* 298, which is titled ‘*The hero-cult and its fanatics*.’

As we know from Davidson (1978, pp. 100-101), you can’t intend what you take to be impossible. So even if monumentalized exemplars only make it seem as though surpassing them is impossible, that very seeming can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. In Nietzsche’s view, this constraint afflicts artists and other creative people who might otherwise do something new with their drives and talents. Such artists’ “path will be barred, their air darkened, if a half-understood monument to some great era of the past is erected as an idol and zealously danced around, as though to say: ‘Behold, this is true art: pay no heed to those who are evolving and want something new!” Later in the same passage, Nietzsche suggests that less creative types “do not desire to see new greatness emerge: their means of preventing it is to say ‘Behold, greatness already exists!’”

This problem is most obvious if the exemplar is perfect, as in Zagzebski’s divine exemplarism. It takes chutzpah to think you can perfectly imitate Christ’s virtue — and even more to think you can surpass him. But even a secular version of admiration-emulation exemplarism falls prey to Nietzsche’s criticism. Recall that the characteristic motivation in this model is to emulate or imitate the exemplar. Doing better — or even simply differently — from the exemplar does not appear as a worthy option, or even an option at all. If this is right, then admirable exemplars are essentially liminal. On the one hand, they stake out a field of possibility and potential. On the other hand, they foreclose any prospect of going further.

In Nietzsche’s framework, by contrast, exemplars of different types elicit different discrete emotions in people with fine-tuned affective sensitivity. While some exemplars inspire admiration that leads to emulation, others incite envy and the motivation to agonistic one-upsmanship. Exemplars of bad or deplorable types provoke contempt and disgust, which serve as signposts of what to avoid (Alfano 2018c). Negative exemplars are also the targets of Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* arguments, which turn out not to be the simple-minded fallacies that he is sometimes accused of committing. If this is right, then Nietzschean exemplarism offers a richer, more evaluatively and motivationally nuanced moral psychology than the monochrome admire-and-emulate model (Zagzebski 2017).

Nietzsche also pays special attention to the role of community in fostering virtues. For him, one’s community and the language used by that community play a constitutive role in the cultivation of virtue. This is because part of what it means for a person to be of a certain type is that she is susceptible to social determination of her character (Alfano 2015b). Some types are *meta-types*. They’re not dispositions to *act* in certain ways, but dispositions to *become* *the sort of person who acts* in particular to-be-specified ways. Unlike Aristotle, who thinks that one becomes virtuous through practice and habituation, realizing all the while that one is not yet virtuous but aiming to become so, Nietzsche thinks that the temporal relation sometimes runs in the other direction. First, one supposes, imagines, hopes, or fantasizes oneself to be a certain way. In so doing, one becomes committed to a standard of conduct that includes not only one’s actions but also one’s thoughts, feelings, emotions, and deliberative strategies. Commitment to this standard in turn induces congruent behavior. Thus, thinking of oneself as having certain traits is temporally and conceptually prior to actually having those traits. This is a theme that crops up especially in the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche describes the nobles not so much as being psychologically higher but as imagining themselves to be higher psychologically (because they are already politically higher), as enchanted by the pathos of distance (*Genealogy* I.3, III.14). This pathos induces (enough of) them to behave as if they were higher, which has knock-on social effects that lead to self-confirmatory conduct. This theme also crops up, in a less uplifting way, in his description of psychological slavishness — a disposition to simulate, mimic, or acquire whatever character traits are attributed to one. Instead of or in addition to feeling committed to a certain code of conduct, the slavish person feels that other people, especially others with the power to impose sanctions and punishments, expect him to behave in accordance with a certain code of conduct. Thus, while both psychological masters and psychological slaves become what they are taken to be, the masters do so by becoming what they take themselves to be (and what fellow masters take them to be), whereas the psychologically slavish become what others take them to be.

Thus, there are two Nietzschean styles of becoming what one is called: the social and the reflexive. Someone whose character is built according to the social plan becomes what others consider and call him — good, bad, or mixed. By contrast, someone whose personality is built according to the reflexive plan becomes what she considers and calls herself. Nietzsche associates this method of personality construction with masterliness. One of Nietzsche’s great innovations is the idea that there is a *looping effect* between the psychological disposition named by a character trait-term and the practice of using that term (Hacking 2006). While he affirms that people are differentially disposed to certain patterns of behavior, he conceives of these dispositions as fluid both in their objects and, to a lesser degree, in their strength and aim. The valence and content of the labels applied to an agent, together with the power-relation between the labeler and labeled, interact with her preexisting psychological dispositions to produce the kind of person she eventually becomes.

Because Nietzsche held a type-relative unity of virtue thesis, if we want to discern his virtue theory, we need to look at his self-attributions. This allows us to pick out the set of traits he considers virtues *for his type*. Thus, there is no universal specification of “the virtues” in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nevertheless, we can say quite a bit about the virtues he celebrates in his own type. Most of these are more closely connected to epistemic than traditionally moral or prudential flourishing.

The first distinctively Nietzschean virtue is curiosity (Alfano 2013, Bamford forthcoming, Christy forthcoming, Reginster 2013). It is notably epistemic and therefore better contextualized by contemporary virtue epistemology (especially responsibilist epistemology — on which see Roberts & Wood 2007) than contemporary virtue ethics. Curiosity is deeply embedded in Nietzsche’s perspectivism. He thinks that perspectives support inquiry in essential ways. For him, a perspective is emotional and evaluative. The perspective someone inhabits leads them to see some things as good, right, noble, admirable, desirable, or enviable, while also leading them to see other things as bad, wrong, base, contemptible, disgusting, aversive, or pitiable. One’s perspective reveals and emphasizes (sometimes overemphasizes) some of the evaluative properties of the things in one’s ambit. For example, Nietzsche argues that we can never give a rational ground for our synthetic *a priori* judgments, but that we hold onto them nevertheless because they belong to “the perspectival optics of life” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 11). Then, in *Beyond Good and Evil* 32, he characterizes the shift from basing evaluations of actions on their consequences to basing evaluations on origins (motives) as a “reversal of perspective.” A couple sections later, he declares that “life could not exist except on the basis of perspectival valuations and appearances” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 34). And in *Beyond Good and Evil* 201, he says that, when “the structure of society seems on the whole to be established and secured against external dangers, it is this fear of the neighbor that again creates new perspectives of moral valuation.” In the transition from war to peace, society shifts from valuing courage and cunning, which are useful during periods of insecurity and inter-group conflict, to condemning them as dangerous to internal cohesion. Likewise, in *Beyond Good and Evil* 211, Nietzsche argues that a proper philosopher must have already inhabited a huge number of perspectives: “the philosopher has had to be a critic and a skeptic and a dogmatist and a historian and, moreover, a poet and a collector and traveler and guesser of riddles and moralist and ‘free spirit’ and practically everything” if he wants to be able to “run through the range of human values and value feelings and *be able* to gaze with many eyes and consciences from the heights into every distance, from the depths up to every height, from the corner onto every expanse.”

But the world is a complex place. Inhabiting only one perspective is liable to make complex evaluative phenomena difficult to appreciate. Since perspective-free inquiry is impossible, Nietzsche recommends combatting these unavoidable distortions by taking up different perspectives over time. This is why Nietzsche repeatedly enjoins his readers to get control over their emotions; this control or capacity is, for him an epistemic methodology. Nietzsche first articulated the method of getting control over one’s *pro* and *con* in 1886, when he published *Beyond Good and Evil* and republished *Human, All-too-human* with new prefaces both for the main body of the book and for the *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*. In *Human, All-too-human* P6, we read:

You shall get control over your For and Against and learn to display first one and then the other in accordance with your higher goal. You shall learn to grasp the sense of perspective in every value judgment — the displacement, distortion and merely apparent teleology of horizons and whatever else pertains to perspectivism; also the quantum of stupidity that resides in antitheses of values and the whole intellectual loss which every For, every Against costs us. You shall learn to grasp the *necessary* injustice in every For and Against, injustice as inseparable from life, life itself as *conditioned* by the sense of perspective and its injustice.

In this neglected passage, Nietzsche argues that evaluative perspectives are unavoidable, and that each one brings with it “displacement, distortion, and merely apparent teleology.” He responds to these distortions neither by trying to eliminate perspective altogether nor by seeking a perspective evacuated of value and emotion, but by getting control one’s emotions and learning “to display first one and then the other.” Perspectivism is meant to reveal, through the controlled cycling-through of various emotional and evaluative points of view, properties that would otherwise be invisible and to rectify inquiry by pitting biases of perspectives against each other. Nietzsche developed this methodology to express the virtue of curiosity. Nietzschean curiosity is a drive to engage in inquiry, especially when that inquiry is into interesting subjects and is both intellectually and morally challenging. In addition, Nietzschean curiosity does not stop when it arrives at an answer; it always finds a new question, a new investigation, a new inquiry. The curious person is concerned with the product of investigation; she would not be satisfied with false beliefs, unsupported beliefs, or the withholding of judgment. But she is even more concerned with the process of investigation; she can’t stop thinking, inferring, refuting, synthesizing, and so on. For Nietzsche, doxastic change through investigation is essential. He says that the will to truth “still tempt[s]” to “many a venture” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 1) and that “travelers and adventurers” like him discover a “world of insight” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 23). Nietzschean curiosity is opposed to both *ataraxia* and faith because faith, as he understands it, is the disposition to stop investigating. It’s an expression of the need for something firm “that one does not wish to be shaken because one *clings* to it” (*Gay Science* 347). Faith is “a *veto* on science” because it involves “not *wanting* to know the truth” (*Antichrist* 52). This makes sense if the virtue of curiosity is a drive, since drives impel their bearers to act. Nietzschean curiosity is a matter of struggling with difficult, interesting questions.

The next characteristically Nietzschean virtue is courage, which, like all Nietzschean virtues, is a disposition to engage in characteristic patterns of activity and evaluation. His version of courage is more a matter of intellectual confrontation than of martial or physical contest. It’s a matter of managing one’s fears in the midst of inquiry and of approaching epistemic phenomena with aplomb and self-assurance. It’s also a matter of doubting where others are certain, of exercising one’s conscience about questions, and of laughing contemptuously at the sacred values and sacred cows of one’s community. While it may be uncontroversial to say that courage is the virtue most relevant to responding to threats, Nietzsche has an idiosyncratic take on which threats are most worth finding and facing. Nietzsche sees curiosity and thinking well of people (both others and oneself) as implacable enemies. If one seeks the truth only to do the good, he says, one “finds nothing” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 35). If Nietzschean curiosity is a matter of investigating difficult problems, of overcoming great intellectual resistances, then one of its purest expressions is in the investigation precisely of the most nauseating facts about ourselves. The soul of the intellectually courageous investigator is the battleground on which curiosity contends with “life-preserving errors,” where the question “To what extent can truth endure incorporation?” is put to the torture (*Gay Science* 110).

The third characteristically Nietzschean virtue is the pathos of distance, which is associated with the emotions of contempt and disgust (Alfano 2018a). Nietzsche appropriated and modified a medieval taxonomy of *spernere mundum* (contempt for the world), *spernere neminem* (contempt for no one), *spernere se ipsum* (contempt for oneself), and *spernere se sperni* (contempt for being contemned). Each of these, though especially the last two, serve epistemic functions by making it possible to investigate contemptible aspects of oneself and one’s community.

Nietzsche’s disdain for “the world” gets translated into Zarathustra’s struggle to affirm the eternal recurrence despite the existence of “the most contemptible person”: “*the last man*” (*Zarathustra* Prologue 5). The last man has no sense of wonder or curiosity to transfix him; instead, even his inquiries into love, creation, longing, and the universe are accompanied by “blinking.” The last man is overly familiar with people, things, and concepts that should only be approached with reverence. In this passage, Zarathustra compares the last man to vermin and heaps scorn on his claim to have invented happiness. The goal of the last man is to smooth out all differences between people. Politically, this means “No shepherd and one herd!” Psychologically, it means that “Each wants the same, each is the same.”

Nietzsche doesn’t advocate the great contempt for its own sake. Instead, he offers it as a challenge — the same challenge he first issued in *Gay Science* 341: affirming the eternal recurrence despite the existence of so many small, petty, and contemptible people, institutions, and values. This brings us to *spernere neminem*. How could someone who brags that his writings are “a schooling” in contempt (*Human All-too-human* P1) despise no one? How could someone whose own autobiography drips with open contempt (*Ecce Homo* Clever 10, Books.UM) spurn no one? For Nietzsche, *spernere neminem* means affirming life and the eternal recurrence *despite* a clear-eyed recognition of the contemptible last man. One overcomes one’s revulsion and ultimately achieves a positive affective relationship to life.

The third *spernere* is *spernere se ipsum*. It is essential to Nietzsche’s project that one be capable of scorning *others* because a highly-tuned capacity of “refined contempt” (*Gay Science* 379) makes one sensitive to the dross and dregs in *oneself*, which prompts what Nietzsche calls self-overcoming. This theme dates back to *History for Life* 2, where he discusses the self-contempt of great men in their final hours, when they regard their own deaths as an opportunity to rid themselves of what was unworthy in them. In *Schopenhauer as Educator* 6, Nietzsche claims that self-contempt draws out what is noble in oneself. This is a consistent refrain in his writings. In *Human, All-too-human* P3, he says that a “lightning-bolt of contempt” for what one had previously loved and considered one’s duty is a first step in becoming a free spirit. In *Daybreak* 56, he claims that the free spirit “reaches up even to the forbidden fruits of *spernere se sperni* and *spernere se ipsum*.”

Nietzsche also discusses *spernere se sperni* in *Human, All-too-human* 137, where he characterizes it as at once sublime and dangerous (just like Christianity): some people “feel so great a need to exercise their strength and lust for power that, in default of other objects or because their efforts in other directions have always miscarried, they at last hit upon the idea of tyrannizing over certain parts of their own nature.” In this passage, Nietzsche goes on to say that people filled with *spernere se sperni* go out of their way to destroy their own reputations, to provoke the disrespect of others, and to prompt others to accuse them of inconsistency. In such paradoxical displays, “man worships a part of himself as God and for that he needs to diabolize the other part.” The prime exemplar Nietzsche names is none other than Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount. It might seem, then, that Nietzsche could not possibly be saying that *spernere se sperni* is noble. But that is exactly his claim: Christian contempt is dangerous *because* it is a temptation to people who embody the pathos of distance.

In addition, disgust serves an epistemic purpose in Nietzsche’s virtue theory. While contempt and disgust are sometimes put to the same use, disgust in particular is Nietzsche’s favored tool for detaching from an ideal (*Schopenhauer as Educator* 2). Such detachment is essential for those who wish to investigate ideals with clear eyes and thus serves an epistemic function. If this is right, then contempt and disgust support the intellectually courageous inquiry that Nietzsche associates with curiosity and intellectual courage.

The fourth characteristically Nietzschean virtue is having a sense of humor (Alfano 2018b) — a virtue that has received some attention in Nietzsche scholarship (Pappas 2005) but very little from the wider philosophical community (Lippitt 2005). A sense of humor, which often expresses contempt, is allied most closely with the pathos of distance, but it also integrates with both curiosity and intellectual courage. Moreover, a sense of humor can be elicited, shaped, and sharped through social processes — especially the laughter of others who share the agent’s type. For Nietzsche, a sense of humor is essential to opening up the path to inquiry into the laughable and contemptible. Someone with this kind of sense of humor doesn’t just wait for risible moments and encounters; they hunt down the laughable things in life. People with a Nietzschean sense of humor don’t just wait for risible moments and encounters; they hunt down the laughable things in life. Some of their inquiries terminate in laughing affirmation of truths that would be hard to take without a mirthful buffer. Some of their inquiries terminate in laughing negation of cherished illusions. And some of the most important inquiries that having a sense of humor fosters are into oneself and one’s own character. Nietzsche thinks that the ability to laugh at oneself — to play the role of both the producer and the object — supports *spernere se ipsum*, which in turn makes possible both self-knowledge and self-overcoming. In *Zarathustra* Higher 15, Zarathustra enjoins the higher men: “Learn to laugh at yourselves as one must laugh!” And in *Beyond Good and Evil* 191, Nietzsche asks of Socrates,

didn’t he spend his whole life laughing at the shortcomings of his clumsy, noble Athenians, who, like all noble people, were men of instinct and could never really account for why they acted the way they did? But in the end, silently and secretly, he laughed at himself as well; with his acute conscience and self-scrutiny, he discovered the same difficulty and shortcoming in himself.

Someone who is able to laugh at their own imperfections is also, sometimes, able to see those imperfections as unimportant. This makes it possible to abandon them, to change, to become a different and perhaps more worthy and interesting person.

The fifth characteristically Nietzschean virtue is solitude. At first blush, it might seem odd to call solitude a virtue. Virtues are traits of agents, whereas solitude sounds like a relation between an agent and the community from which the agent withdraws or is excluded. However, when Nietzsche talks about solitude, he typically has in mind emotional rather than physical distance. For example, in *Human, All-too-human* AOM 386, he declares that “wisdom is the whispering of the solitary [*Einsamen*] to himself in the crowded marketplaces.” Such emotional solitude can be fostered by physical solitude; Nietzsche’s frequent invocations of lonely mountain hikes and solitary birds of prey suggests as much. He seems to especially favor being alone in nature as an embodied method of cultivating emotional solitude. For instance, in *Human, All-too-human* WS 200, which is titled “*The solitary* [Einsame] *speaks*,” Nietzsche says, “As a recompense for much ennui, ill-humor, and boredom, such as a solitude without friends, books, duties, or passions must entail, one harvests those quarters of an hour of the deepest immersion in oneself and in nature.”

Solitude is the drive to get away from, and often above, one’s in-group or local community, to view that community and its values critically, and to divorce oneself from aspects of the community that one might otherwise adopt uncritically and by default. Because Nietzschean virtues are constitutively social, this motion tends to be associated with pangs of loneliness, alienation, self-doubt, and even despair. It contravenes the herd instinct, which can provoke pangs of conscience. However, just as the ability to laugh at oneself is an important part of self-criticism and self-improvement, so the ability to look from a distance and a height down on one’s community is essential to cultural critique. Solitude is thus the virtue that opposes vices like chauvinism, narrow-mindedness, and cozy cultural smugness. If this is right, it helps to make sense of Nietzsche’s incessant diatribes against his fellow Germans and their heroes like Immanuel Kant, David Strauss, and Richard Wagner. In addition, solitude is connected to the perspectivist methodology because it is essentially restless. The person who embodies Nietzschean solitude does not simply wander off into the wilderness never to be seen or heard from again. Instead, he sojourns in solitude then returns with cultural critique. He is forever adopting new perspectives on his own community. For example, in *Daybreak* 114, Nietzsche suggests that “intellectual benefit” accrues to anyone who experiences “profound solitude.” But solitude’s value is not only epistemic. It also contributes to emotional wellbeing. In *Daybreak* 177, which is titled, “*Learning solitude*” Nietzsche declaims, “O you poor devils in the great cities of world politics, you gifted young men tormented by ambition who consider it your duty to pass some comment on everything that happens — and there is always something happening!”

Finally, conscience ties the Nietzschean virtues together. Nietzsche distinguishes four types of conscience. First, there is conscience *simpliciter*, which he associates with the herd instinct. This conscience dictates some actions as obligatory and forbids others as impermissible. Second, there is the good conscience, which someone enjoys to the extent that expressing their drives neither induces negative self-directed emotions that respond to fixed aspects of the self nor provokes reactions from the agent’s community that are liable to be internalized as negative self-directed emotions that respond to fixed aspects of the self. In other words, the good conscience names some of the components of internal and external integration that transmute a drive into a virtue. Third, there is the bad conscience, which Nietzsche construes as the instinct of cruelty turned upon oneself or some aspect of oneself. In *Genealogy* II.4, he asks how “the consciousness of guilt, the ‘bad conscience’” arose. He answers this question in *Genealogy* II.6, saying that it was in “the sphere of legal obligations that the moral conceptual world of ‘guilt’, ‘conscience’, ‘duty’, ‘sacredness of duty’ had its origin.” Over the next several sections, he explains this seemingly bizarre origin, then summarizes his view in *Genealogy* II.16: “I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced — that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society.” Speaking of people after they’ve entered the strictures and constraints of the social straitjacket, he says, “suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and ‘suspended’.” Which instincts does he have in mind? He tells us: “all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward *against man himself*. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction — all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of the ‘bad conscience.’” In subsequent passages, Nietzsche drives home this identification. For instance, *Genealogy* II.17, he says, the “*instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent — we have seen it already — this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone is what the *bad conscience* is.”

It might at first seem that Nietzsche thinks the bad conscience is to be done away with, but he actually associates it with *spernere se ipsum*. The bad conscience thus has work to do in the cultivation of virtue. But it can only do that work if it is directed towards aspects of the self that are not fixed. Moreover, it can only do that work if it does not, as a side-effect, undermine or destroy the embodied and psychological conditions conducive to the life of the agent. Thus, Nietzsche aims to harness the bad conscience in the service of virtue. This is especially the case when it comes to the intellectual conscience, which for him is an epistemic manifestation of the bad conscience. For example, in *Gay Science* 335, Nietzsche contrasts conscience, which commands actions, with intellectual conscience, which he calls “A conscience behind your ‘conscience’.” The first-order conscience, he suggests, is enculturated by one’s community:

*that* you hear this or that judgment as the words of conscience, i.e., *that* you feel something to be right may have its cause in your never having thought much about yourself and in your blindly having accepted what has been labelled *right* since your childhood; or in the fact that fulfilling your duties has so far brought you bread and honors.

When Nietzsche refers to unvarnished conscience, he has in mind the disposition to do and consider obligatory whatever actions are deemed acceptable, normal, or dutiful in one’s community. The intellectual conscience, by contrast, impels inquiry into the background conditions that furnish content to the first-order conscience. Nietzsche contends that, “had you reflected more subtly, observed better, and studied more, you would never continue to call this ‘duty’ of yours and this ‘conscience’ of yours duty and conscience.” The intellectual conscience thus contributes to the processes that transmute instincts and other drives into Nietzschean virtues.

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