Does suffering really matter?

Abstract. Is suffering really bad? In *On What Matters*, the late Parfit argued that we all have reasons to want to avoid future agony and that the suffering is in itself "doubly bad", for the one who suffers and impersonally, and it is so objectively and intrinsically. Call it Realism about the Value of Suffering (RVS). This paper has two aims. It argues against RVS by drawing from a broadly genealogical debunking of our evaluative attitudes, showing that each of the responses to debunking available to the realist fails. It also argues that a Nietzschean approach is well suited to support the challenge, knowing that, for Parfit, Nietzsche is the ultimate test of his hope that we can converge on fundamental normative truths. I conclude that whether suffering matters is a matter of our attitudes rather than a mind-independent normative truth.

1. Introduction

Pains—headaches, stubbed toes, hunger; mild, stabbing, throbbing, chronic acute, —hurt. In normal conditions, they're supposed to feel bad; they're typically aversive. Psychological suffering—moods, anxiety, depression, PTSD—too. And we not only mind our suffering, whether physical or psychological (including but not exclusively pains), we also mind the suffering of others. According to moral realism, there are mind-independent moral facts. For instance, the nearly universally held belief that suffering is in itself bad. According to *Realism about the Value of Suffering* (RVS),

> In all possible worlds, suffering is bad regardless of our evolutionary history and of how our attitudes toward it could differ.

On RVS, there is such a thing as the correct attitude to suffering—one's own or someone else's—namely, judging that it is bad and ought not to occur or go on, a judgment that is true whether or not its badness consists in how it feels.

Suffering occupies a central place in the work of two very different philosophers: the late Derek Parfit and Nietzsche throughout his published and unpublished work. In the second volume of *On What Matters,* Parfit dedicates more than a chapter to Nietzsche, following a discussion of moral disagreement and moral convergence,[1] and describes him as "the most influential and admired philosopher of the last two centuries" (OWM II 570; cf. 1984: 176). There, Parfit argues for *Double Badness of Suffering* (DBS):

> All suffering is in itself both bad for the sufferer and impersonally bad. (II 569)

The badness of suffering is the canonical example of an "irreducibly normative truth": we have reasons, personal and impersonal, to want pain to cease or not to occur, and such reasons are primitive: they do not depend on our attitudes or other facts. Truths about suffering are not explained by our desires; rather, our desires are justified when they track our objective reasons.

According to Parfit, suffering is intrinsically bad and all sufferings matter equally. Nietzsche, on the other hand, denies both claims. For one thing, Nietzsche repudiates the idea that value is invariant (e.g. BGE 2, GS 340; TI, "Skirmishes", 49). Reducing suffering would not necessarily, on his view, make the world or anyone's life better; sometimes

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[1] Hereafter I will use the abbreviation OWM followed by volume and page (e.g., OWM II 571). I will use the conventional abbreviations for Nietzsche's works, cited by part and section (e.g., G: II: 3). Posthumous fragments are cited following their classification in the *Kritische Studienausgabe*, with volume and page numbers when applicable.

A	*The Anti-Christ*
BGE	*Beyond Good and Evil*
D	*Daybreak*
GM	*On the Genealogy of Morality*
GS	*The Gay Science*
HH	*Human, All Too Human*
KSA	*Kritische Studienausgabe.*
TI	*The Twilight of Idols*

quite the contrary. As part of his project of revaluation of our values, Nietzsche is committed to a "*radical* revaluation of the role and significance of suffering in human existence" (Reginster 2006: 44) Nietzsche thus threatens Parfit's hope that philosophers would in nearly ideal conditions converge on fundamental normative truths such as DBS. This is one of the reasons why "we cannot ignore Nietzsche," according to Parfit.

My question in this paper is whether RVS is susceptible to genealogical debunking. Parfit's focus on suffering is well motivated. Unlike many moral beliefs, our attitudes toward suffering seem secure. There is nearly universal consensus about it, and Parfit thinks we can explain away residual disagreement as the product of distorting influences. And indeed, Parfit is not alone. The view that pain (more broadly, suffering) is intrinsically bad has wide currency, including (but not only) in vindications of hedonism about well-being, objectivism, or utilitarianism. Although this standard view need not presuppose a non-naturalist moral realism *à la* Parfit, it does, I think, involve some version of RVS. So, my paper has two aims. I argue against defences of RVS, and I rely on a Nietzschean approach to bring into focus the core of the challenge. This approach is motivated by Parfit's own admission that we cannot ignore Nietzsche on the issue, by the fact that Nietzsche's contrarian views serve as a test of the non-debunkable nature of DBS, and by the fact that contemporary evolutionary debunking arguments and Nietzsche's genealogy bear important similarities. Later in the paper, I adduce some empirical evidence in favour or Nietzsche's psychological view to defuse the lingering suspicion that heterodox views like Nietzsche's cannot constitute viable counterexamples to DBS and RVS. In fact, the evidence explains our attitudes toward suffering without presupposing RVS. I proceed as follows. Sections 2-4 set the stage and summarize Parfit's case for RVS—the relation between suffering and metaethics (2), between reasons and

agony (3), and the argument for convergence (4). Sections 5-9 motivate the debunking challenge (5) and raise four objections to RVS (6-9), relating some recent empirical work to the import of the Nietzschean genealogy of our attitudes.

2. Suffering and metaethics

In OWM, Parfit argues that there is a unique true moral principle, on which the most plausible moral theories (utilitarianism, Kantianism, and contractualism) converge: the "Triple Theory". But for convergence to be significant, it must be the case that moral claims are objectively true and irreducibly normative. Case in point, normative claims about suffering are made true by objective facts that are modally necessary and causally and constitutively independent of our attitudes. Parfit seeks to vindicate cognitivism (moral judgments are truth-apt, express propositions), objectivism (moral truths are independent of judgments and attitudes), non-naturalism (moral facts are not identical or reducible to natural facts), externalism (our reasons do not depend on our motives) and a form of rational intuitionism (the possibility of moral knowledge). In sum, moral facts are mind-independent irreducible normative truths on which we can converge (II 544). These truths are not known by empirical discovery but intuition and rational argument. (III 200-1)

But what does metaethics have to say about relieving suffering? According to anti-realists, our reasons do not turn on the truth of a particular metaethical view. In his review of OWM, Allan Gibbard (2012) writes that, "[s]uffering matters whatever the story of normative properties turns out to be". Yet to Parfit the story matters greatly. It matters that we have objective reasons to care about everyone's well-being, grounded in the intrinsic badness of suffering, because this belief can lead us to do more to prevent or

relieve their suffering. (OWM III 190) More generally, if naturalism turned out to be true (i.e., if there were no irreducibly normative facts), "Sidgwick, Ross, [Parfit], and others would have wasted much of [their] lives." For they "have asked what matters" (II 367)[2] and for things to really matter, it must be possible to be objectively right. In other words, our *really* having normative reasons hinges on the existence of irreducibly normative truths. It would be "a tragedy" if there were no moral facts or if we could not agree on a single true morality. Still, anti-realists are not moved. Simon Blackburn: "outside the charmed walls of All Souls College, there actually are tragedies" (2011); Max Hayward: "the truth can be uncomfortable and even unpleasant." Given that "[r]ealists … have long argued that truth in ethics is independent of whatever anyone happens to think about it", the fact that the truth of naturalism would be tragic for Parfit doesn't "count as evidence against its truth." (2018: 735)

For the argument's sake, I will assume that Parfit is right to worry that, if RVS were not justified, our reasons to reduce suffering may not be as robust or universal as one might expect. Also, if convergence is either impossible or explainable by natural facts, we have no reason to believe that our attitudes map onto objective moral facts. Suffering must matter in a special sense to generate the sort of normative reasons that Parfit has in mind.

3. Suffering and reasons

According to the *Argument from Agony* (OWM I, ch. 3-4), suffering provides irreducibly normative reasons. If so, suffering constitutes a counter-example to Parfit's meta-ethical rivals, for anti-realists and naturalists cannot explain this basic fact (II 551). RVS is a

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[2] Naturalists claim they cannot countenance normative claims about what we have "most reason to do". Most contributors to Singer (2017) seek to deflate Parfit's tragic implication that nothing could matter if naturalism were true.

normative truth in the "reason-implying sense": we necessarily have reasons to want to avoid future suffering, which we know intuitively just as we know it's wrong to torture people for fun. RVS is not a psychological claim:

> Naturalists could point out that nearly everyone does want to avoid future agony, at least if this agony would be in the fairly near future. But the fact that people *have* this desire cannot give them a *reason* to have this desire. (OWM III 67)

Parfit does not argue that suffering is universally psychologically aversive.[34] Our actual desires and preferences do not bear on normative truth. It is the value of suffering that explains our dislike, and which of our desires are rational. Many anti-realists concede the premise that we all have reasons to avoid future agony, but they deny that it follows that our reasons are objective (i.e., subjectivism can explain our attitudes; cf. Sobel 2011). But Parfit argues that subjectivism, by grounding our reasons in our desires, makes them depend on desires that we have no prior reasons to have—a normative quicksand, as it were (I 73-82). Still, subjectivists and Parfit could agree that suffering is always bad, even if the former denied RVS robustly construed. On the other hand, Nietzsche does not simply reject the conditional that, if we all have reasons to avoid agony, such reasons must be objective; he denies the antecedent.

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[3] Most of Parfit's examples involve ordinary physical pains like being whipped or the sensation of red-hot iron (OWM II 459, 541), but he recognizes that psychic suffering can be worse (569). Nietzsche seems to use 'suffering' (*Leiden*), 'pain' (*Schmerz*), and 'displeasure' (*Unlust/Unmut*) quite interchangeably. For clearer distinctions, see Reginster (2006: 113-114; 234-235).

[4] The two main theories of pain and pleasure are the *phenomenological* theory and the *attitudinal* theory. On the former, a pain or pleasure is defined by how it is felt; on the latter, by its relation to the subject's pro-/con-attitudes towards the sensation. Eden Lin argues for a hybrid theory (forthcoming). Parfit, at least in OWM, also appears to endorse a mixed view: it is not the sensations that are bad but our awareness of having a sensation that we dislike (I 54), i.e., the hedonic character of conscious states. More relevant: objective reasons must be independent of both our desires and the phenomenology of suffering, and our desires are justified by the nature of suffering is not a conceptual but normative truth (II 551). Parfit thus allows for a dissociation between certain sufferings and the reasons to avoid them: I would be evaluatively mistaken to value a migraine.

In sum, our reasons to avoid suffering are primitive and prior to our experiences. Suffering is a source of impartial, or "person-neutral," reasons in that no reference to any particular person attaches to the explanation of why one ought to reduce it. We all have reasons to regret, prevent or relieve the suffering of anyone (I 138). Parfit and Nagel (1986: 161) concur: "the pain can be detached in thought from the fact that it is mine without losing any of its dreadfulness. ... suffering is a bad thing, period, and not just for the sufferer." The connection between metaethics and our normative reasons is therefore clear. Parfit's Triple Theory, including our impartial reasons to reduce suffering, hinge on a robust form of moral realism, where the disvalue of suffering acts as a bridging principle. It's thus clear why Parfit would hope that philosophers could converge on this normative bedrock: moral theory itself, he believes, turns on it. Let's now turn to the pivotal part of the argument where Nietzsche's threat arises.

4. Convergence and disagreement

DBS is one judgment on which everyone would ideally agree. In fact, there is nearly universal agreement about the badness of *undeserved* suffering.[5] So, Parfit hopes, in ideal conditions, we will someday recognize normative truths regardless of our metaethical disagreements (II 550). These conditions are described by an empirical prediction, the *Convergence Claim* (CC):

> If everyone knew all of the relevant non-normative facts, used the same normative concepts, understood and carefully reflected on the relevant arguments, and was

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[5] If there is one thing on which Parfit and Nietzsche agree, albeit for quite different reasons, is that no one can deserve to suffer.

not affected by any distorting influence, we and others would have similar normative beliefs. (II 546)

Because we can all make mistakes, even in ideal conditions, Parfit adds that "it would be enough to defend the prediction that ... we would *nearly* all have *sufficiently similar* normative beliefs." (p. 547) CC specifies the conditions of reasonable disagreement and its resolution. If Parfit can show that Nietzsche does not meet the conditions (e.g., as Parfit suggests, Nietzsche lacks a proper concept of reasons, is engaged in motivated reasoning, or his mind was deteriorating), then he can show that Nietzsche poses no serious threat to CC. I will argue that Parfit cannot salvage CC against the Nietzschean challenge. My argument rests on a *principle of parity*: for every attempt to debunk denials of DBS, Parfit must be able to show that his own views are not equally susceptible to distorting influences. But, as the Nietzschean challenge will show, RVS is not immune.

Parfit rightly sees Nietzsche as a challenge. The question is whether Nietzsche's position could garner support under ideal conditions of reasoning. According to Parfit, when Nietzsche doesn't contradict himself or is not confused, they actually agree. For example, he remarks that Nietzsche often characterizes suffering as *instrumentally* valuable (BGE 225, HH I 235). Nietzsche's critique of the morality of compassion is well-known (GS 338, 377, BGE 44, 202, GM, Preface, 5). It rests, in part, on a revaluation of the role of suffering in human life. Suffering can be a necessary evil for superior goods such as the lives of geniuses like Goethe, Beethoven, or Napoleon.

> The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering—do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with

great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness—was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (*BGE*, 225)

Nietzsche also often seems to suggest that suffering is desirable *for its own sake*; that achievements have value, not in spite of, but *in virtue* of suffering. On one interpretation of Nietzsche's claims, he seems to be claiming that suffering need not always be bad, that particular kinds of suffering can be essential for growth, creativity or greatness for particular people. Richardson argues that Nietzsche (also) held a stronger view, "making *every* case of suffering good" ... even the physical agony of those quite unable to overcome it and grow through it" (2015: 103). Either way, Nietzsche's views are incompatible with DBS, for even the weak interpretation presupposes that suffering can be valued for its own sake as part of a good whole, not merely instrumentally.

Such views, Parfit claims, reflect distorting influences (a life of intense pain, dementia, a taste for hyperbole ...). Here is the sort of claims that troubles Parfit: "You want, if possible ... *to abolish suffering.* And us? – it looks as though *we* would prefer it to be heightened and made even worse than it has ever been!" (BGE 225) In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche praises Lou Salomé's poem *Hymn to life* for its "yes-saying pathos"; "pain does not count as an objection to life" (EH, Zarathustra, 1). And Nietzsche's formula for greatness, *amor fati*, states: "you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity" (EH, Why I am so clever, 10). For Parfit, such passages "conflict deeply with what most of us believe." Nietzsche, he suggests, only "tried to believe that suffering is not bad" (OWM II 571). Parfit offers his diagnosis: Nietzsche only wanted to believe that everything is good because he needed to justify his own suffering—a personal motivation

that exerted a distorting influence on his reasoning. Hence, on Parfit's terms, one condition of genuine disagreement is missing (571-2). When Nietzsche denies that suffering is bad it is not his true position or one we should take seriously. Textual support for this interpretation is slim, and commentators have shown that Nietzsche's view is more coherent than Parfit suggests (Huddleston 2017; Janaway 2016; Reginster 2006; Richardson 2015). This could be enough to undermine CC. But I want to argue that, more than a coherent view, Nietzsche offers ammunition against the immunity of RVS itself.

5. Motivating the debunking challenge

Generally, evolutionary explanations of our beliefs seek to undermine objectivism by casting them as systematically prone to error, modally contingent or better explained by non-truth-tracking processes. This works along two dimensions. *Synchronically*, to the extent that our evaluative beliefs depend on "epistemically defective emotional and motivational processes," they are unjustified. (Nichols 2014) *Diachronically*, our moral judgments and norms can be traced to their cultural and environmental origins among our hominid ancestors. The explanation of how we moralize our responses to violations of evolved prosocial norms is only contingently related to what we take to be the moral truth. Had our evolution been different, we might have ended up with radically different beliefs. Such contingency poses a problem because moral discourse presupposes invariant moral reasons (Joyce 2001; 2016). If we further assume that the evolutionary processes that gave rise to our moral beliefs are unreliable, then even minor variations along the evolutionary path would have led us to mostly false moral beliefs, regardless of what the moral truths are (Street 2006). These, in a nutshell, are common moves among contemporary evolutionary debunkers. But note that debunking does not establish the falsity of our beliefs; rather, that our justifications for holding them are undercut in the

absence of countervailing evidence. With this caveat in mind, an explanation debunking when it is *justification-undermining*. As I argue below, several routes to justifying RVS are unavailable to the realist because they are vulnerable to debunking. In other words, debunking blocks Parfit's inference to CC because the main contender for convergence is not the object of an epistemically robust agreement. But lest we forget the caveat, my debunking argument does not entail that beliefs in the objective and/or intrinsic badness of suffering are false, simply that the burden lies on the realist to show that our attitudes toward suffering cannot be better explained in ways that do not presuppose RVS.

The history of morality is rife with radical variations in moral norms across time and cultures. Shaun Nichols' historical account (2004) documents how "harm-norms" have evolved to expand the scope of moral concern (alongside both an enhanced sensitivity and lessened exposure to the suffering of others) to include most or all human beings and even nonhuman animals. We presently disapprove of many moral norms (e.g., cruel punishments or a greater disposition to violence) that our ancestors widely accepted. Cultural evolution, it turns out, accounts pretty well for both the stability and the disappearance of such norms. Objectivism doesn't. We needn't go as far as claiming that our evaluative beliefs are *systematically* mistaken (i.e. error theory). Instead, we have plausible diachronic and synchronic but justification-undermining (i.e. epistemically off-track) explanations of our attitudes that do not presuppose objective evaluative facts. In sum, debunkers argue that epistemically unreliable causal processes undercut our justifications for many of our beliefs. The question is whether DBS is safe.

According to Street (2006: 150), there is a ready explanation for our attitudes toward suffering:

It is of course no mystery whatsoever, from an evolutionary point of view, why we and the other animals came to take the sensations associated with bodily conditions such as [cuts, burns, bruises, broken bones] to count in favor of what would avoid, lessen, or stop them rather than in favor of what would bring about and intensify them.

Parfit views correct moral beliefs as immune to evolutionary debunking because they are discovered by reason, like logical and mathematical truths. Like our epistemic reasons are immune to debunking, so too can we assume that we can discover at least some irreducibly normative truths.[6] Sharon Street (2006), one of Parfit's main interlocutors, argues that, since our "basic evaluative tendencies" were shaped by evolutionary forces unrelated to the moral truth, most of moral judgments, for all we know, may be off-track. The realist must show that an incredible (and inexplicable) coincidence took place, that evolutionary pressures shaped our evaluative attitudes just such that they luckily reached the truth. Street argues that the truth of our beliefs need not figure into the explanation of why we hold the beliefs we do. If we have a complete evolutionary or broadly naturalistic explanation of our beliefs, and we were not selected to have true moral beliefs, then we would most likely have evolved the same beliefs *even if* the moral truth turned out to be wildly different from what we believe. We need not even assume that moral facts could be different; we may have ended up with the same beliefs regardless, since the underlying processes are off-track.

Parfit, among others (cf. Lazari-Radek and Singer 2013; 2017), responds that rational reflection exerts a countervailing pressure on the formation of our moral beliefs, which

[6] See Clarke-Doane's (2012) argument that accepting the upshot of the evolutionary debunking of moral realism commits one to a similar debunking of the objectivity of mathematical truths.

makes them reliable. Can this strategy work? Street denies that reason could put us on track. The rationalist objection assumes that

> rational reflection provides some means of standing apart from our evaluative judgements, sorting through them, and gradually separating out the true ones from the false as if with the aid of some uncontaminated tool. … [But] [i]f the fund of evaluative judgements with which human reflection began was thoroughly contaminated with illegitimate influence … then the tools of rational reflection were equally contaminated. (2006: 124)

To this, Lazari-Radek and Singer reply that we have reasons to trust, not our starting points, but the faculty of reasoning itself. Plus, the fact that the capacity was selected for does not impugn the content of the beliefs it generates. Once we evolved a capacity for rational reflection, our ability to discern objective moral truths came as part of a package that could not be "economically divided" (2017: 288). Street claims that our starting points are contaminated; objectivists respond by pointing to a reliable process. But, as Hayward aptly notes, "Street's point is that rational reflection cannot turn muck into gold." (2018: 726) Given contaminated starting points, rational reflection is no more than "a process of assessing evaluative judgements that are mostly off the mark in terms of others that are mostly off the mark." (Street, ibid.) Positing reason, then, will not suffice to immunize our beliefs.[7]

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[7] Skarsaune (2011) offers a conditional argument that, *if* pain is bad, then we can offer a causal story of why we reliably came to form justified beliefs about its badness. But Skarsaune offers no argument that pain is indeed bad. For doubts about this strategy, see Kahane (2014).

We will return to responses to debunking later. For now, I want to sketch recent responses to the broad challenge, illustrated by four objections—peer disagreement, genealogy, opacity, and interpretation—and argue that each fails to immunize DBS.

6. Peer Disagreement

Most evolutionary debunking arguments appeal to the causal processes underlying the formation of our beliefs, but challenges also arise from the existence of disagreement. According to the *Argument from Counterfactual Peer-Disagreement*, because in evolutionary scenarios our counterparts probably have beliefs incompatible with ours, our beliefs are epistemically contingent, and contingency contradicts the objectivity of our beliefs.[8] The strategy purports to be "justification-defeating." Michael Klenk (2018) argues that it fails because the disagreement it reveals is not "epistemically significant." Counterfactual disagreement occurs in scenarios that are either nearby or distant. In nearby scenarios, disagreement does not affect *most* of our beliefs; in distant ones, disagreement is significant but does not occur amongst epistemic *peers*. Certain moral beliefs, it follows, survive the challenge.

If Klenk is right, it could be that disagreement between Nietzsche and Parfit about DBS is not significant either because they do not in fact disagree or because they are not epistemic peers. As recently argued by two commentators, the disagreement between

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[8] The argument differs from the classic argument from disagreement (Harman 1977; Mackie 1977), which typically has two steps. First, there is no significant convergence on fundamental moral beliefs—unlike the empirical sciences, moral theory has made little progress. Second, the best explanation for such disagreements is that moral facts are not objective (or that there are no moral facts at all). Hence, if we have reasons to prefer theories with more explanatory power, we should prefer anti-realism (cf. OWM II 542, 546). Parfit takes issue with both steps. Through the history of morality, "[w]e find a series of challenges to established beliefs, which lead to plausible revisions, and to greater agreement. ... [T]here has been slow but accelerating progress towards the beliefs that everyone's well-being matters equally, and that everyone has equal moral claims. (II 563) Early distortions caused by evolutionary forces "are being erased, such so that more and more people have true moral beliefs." (p. 538) Huemer (2016) also gives a realist explanation of moral progress. On the other hand, see Leiter (2014) for a Nietzschean version of the argument.

Parfit and Nietzsche is in fact significant (Huddleston 2017; Janaway 2016). Nietzsche did hold the coherent view that suffering could have positive value, both for certain individuals and for society, because of its role in fostering flourishing and/or greatness.[9] For Nietzsche, eliminating suffering can reduce the value of a life.[10] In a nutshell, suffering is essentially the feeling of resistance, and life values overcoming resistance insofar as overcoming expresses and enhances power. Human agency, largely subconsciously through drives, values obstacles to the will beyond its mere satisfaction. Insofar as life values power, suffering is a necessary ingredient of what we value. (Reginster 2006: 177) If anything, Nietzsche offers a coherent response to the standard view that suffering is bad for us. If, furthermore, Nietzsche reasons in appropriate conditions, he does threaten CC by contradicting DBS.

There is more, Parfit and Nietzsche hardly share *any* fundamental moral beliefs. For instance, while they seem to agree that we have reasons to promote flourishing, their agreement is shallow, thus undercutting Parfit's debunking move. For, if Nietzsche does possess the relevant concept of reasons, then his reasons stand in stark contrast to the reasons Parfit claims we have to promote well-being. Their respective views of well-being and of its normative implications diverge radically. Parfit claims: "On all plausible theories, everyone's well-being consists at least in part in being happy, and not suffering" (I 101), and all plausible moral theories agree that everyone's well-being matters equally. Nietzsche, on the other hand, argues that suffering can be good and that

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[9] Plausibly, Leiter argues that, on Nietzsche's view, human excellence has intrinsic value and flourishing prudential value. "Morality in the pejorative sense" is wrong because it impedes excellence and flourishing. (2002: 134-6). The problem is not that moral systems presuppose intrinsic value; it's what they value (happiness, pleasure, equality). In contrast, morality condemns the means to excellence and flourishing (suffering, cruelty, inequality).

[10] See Reginster (2006: 103-47, 177). Textual support includes BGE 230, 259; GS 13; A 2; and KSA 11 [111] 13; 14 [173] 13; 14 [174] 13; 11 [75] 13; 9 [151] 12. One of the most striking texts is TW, Skirmishes, 38.

the well-being of all does not matter for its own sake or equally. In sum, in this particular instance, Klenk's first response doesn't help Parfit.

How about the second response? Taking Parfit at his word, Nietzsche should be considered an epistemic peer. After all, he is the ultimate test of CC. One might, like Parfit, attribute residual disagreements to distorting influences. Then, Nietzsche would only be an epistemic peer when they do *not* disagree, but as just noted, there are no such cases. So, this response fails too. Parfit's argument that Nietzsche does not reason in epistemically appropriate conditions is far from convincing (Huddleston 2017; Janaway 2016). We are thus left with genuine peer-disagreement about fundamental moral beliefs. As per the principle of parity, there is no non-question-begging way of dissolving significant disagreement between Nietzsche and Parfit that does not expose Parfit to symmetric debunking. The reply to the *Argument from Counterfactual Peer-Disagreement* thus fails.

7. Genealogy

How, specifically, does genealogy cast doubt on DBS? Genealogy can be defined as an inquiry into the origins and/or causes of a system of beliefs, attitudes, and values. Genealogy is thus primarily descriptive in its form, although its goal can be critical. By uncovering typically hidden or forgotten processes, genealogy can uncover the detrimental effects of some of our values, not just their suspicious origins, also their nefarious consequences. Richard Joyce captures this effect of genealogy as follows:

> [Genealogy] can reveal that the circumstances that rendered ... affective states adaptive on the African savannah (say) no longer hold in the modern world, or fail to hold in some particular circumstances. Genealogical evidence can act as a

defeater of the benefit of the doubt we would otherwise accord an affective state—over-turning the assumption of its contribution to our welfare. (2016: 173-4)

Likewise, Nietzschean genealogy has some probative force if it can show (1) that our beliefs concerning the disvalue of suffering can be explained by factors other than suffering's intrinsic nature; (2) those beliefs can be detrimental to (at least some) individuals. Its force would be showing that we are not necessarily mistaken to believe that suffering can be good in a nontrivial sense—by trivial here I mean not-merely-instrumental. Crucially, genealogy can have this effect in its target's own terms, by destabilizing its claimed authority or legitimacy. Revealing the contingent origins of our values, and the disconnect between their claims and their explanation, reveals an internal inconsistency between the epistemic claims of the target and its actual epistemic credentials (cf. Queloz and Cueni, forthcoming).

As it turns out, many Nietzschean hypotheses have found empirical support confirming the affective and largely subconscious causes of our judgments and decisions as well as our tendency to motivated reasoning, confabulation, and *post-hoc* rationalization (Knobe and Leiter 2007; Telech and Leiter 2016; cf. D 34, GS 335, BGE 5, KSA 13:14 [116]; Haidt 2000; Greene 2007). Nietzsche's hypotheses, alongside evolutionary arguments, put pressure on realism. His diagnosis of our sensitivity to suffering fulfils this critical role by tracing our attitudes toward their physiological causes and explaining morality as a "sign-language of the affects" (BGE 187). Our sensitivity admits of a psycho-physiological diagnosis and is contingent and historically recent, themes explored at length in mature work such as *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Gay Science* (also see Nichols 2004, ch. 6-7). To the extent that Nietzsche's diagnosis applies to morality, it applies to Parfit: RVS might be a symptom of hypersensitivity to suffering that itself is explained by historical and

sociological facts. Nietzsche, in typical provocative fashion, writes that the morality of compassion is "just another expression of ... physiological overexcitability" (TI Skirmishes, 37). On a broadly Nietzschean view, the evolution of harm-norms can explain the rise of (say) hedonism and utilitarianism. "Nietzsche might just as well claim," writes Huddleston, "that the people who denounce suffering as always in itself bad are equally beset by a serious form of psychological distortion. Their weakness and 'softening' make them fetishize the phenomenal character of suffering" (2017: 180; cf. GS 48; BGE 225). On this diagnosis, Parfit is susceptible to distorting influences of his own; he fails to appreciate the intelligibility of Nietzsche's view for the pervasive influence of secular (but ultimately Christian) morality.

Admittedly, Parfit stressed the limits of genealogical objections:

> if some attitude has an evolutionary explanation, this fact is neutral. It neither supports nor undermines the claim that this attitude is justified. But there is one exception. It may be claimed that, since we all have this attitude, this is a ground for thinking it justified. This claim is undermined by the evolutionary explanation. Since there is this explanation, we would all have this attitude even if it was not justified; so the fact that we have this attitude cannot be a reason for thinking it justified. (1984: 186).

Again, in *On What Matters*:

> Nietzsche makes some fascinating claims about the origins of morality, especially Christian morality, and he sometimes suggests that these claims undermine morality. But as Nietzsche himself points out, that is not so. When we learn about the origins of morality, or of many other features of human life, we learn very little

about the present state, or value, of these things. In Nietzsche's words, 'The more insight we possess into an origin the less significant does the origin appear.' [D 44] (OWM II 583)[11]

Granted, both Nietzsche and Parfit warn us against the genetic fallacy. But since genealogy can be justification-undermining and shed light on the harmful effects of our values, Parfit wrongly infers from its intrinsic inability to falsify our beliefs that it cannot bear on their justification. Genealogy leaves the question of whether a given belief is justified open, yet hardly untouched. Unfortunately, Parfit falls short of directly confronting genealogy and treats an open question as (incorrectly) implying the normative insignificance of genealogy.

Remember that Parfit wants to debunk Nietzsche's views. Doing so, Huddleston notes, he risks throwing stones from a glass house. Interestingly, Guy Kahane used a structurally similar objection to the use of evolutionary debunking arguments to vindicate utilitarianism (e.g., Singer 2005; Greene 2007), which pertains to Parfit equally well:

> utilitarianism is empty of content unless supplemented by an account of well-being. But many of our evaluative beliefs about well-being, including the beliefs that pleasure is good and pain is bad, are some of the most obvious candidates for evolutionary debunking.

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[11] Cf. GM II 12; GS 345; KSA 12:2 [131] and [189]. D 44 is *not* about genealogy. Reginster notes that 'origin' translates *Ursprung*, whereas the object of genealogy is *Herkunft*, sometimes translated as 'descent' and meaning "the transmission of an atavism". *Ursprung* "designates a point in time at which a given code came into existence." (2006: 292). Nietzsche means that the origin lacks authority, not that genealogy is not powerful. Nietzsche was indeed careful to avoid the genetic fallacy. Cf. KSA 12:2 [189]: "The inquiry into the *origin of our evaluations* and tables of good is in absolutely no way identical with a critique of them, as is so often believed: even though the insight into some *pudenda origo* certainly brings with it a *feeling* of a diminution in value of the think that originated thus and prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude toward it." (also see GS 345) On the difference between genealogy and global evaluative skepticism, see Queloz and Cueni (forthcoming).

Why should we expect that, if some evaluative beliefs can survive the doxastic purge, the resulting normative view would resemble any of the present competing alternatives? After all, all of these, including utilitarianism, were developed by reflection on a set of evaluative beliefs and intuitions that is at least partly infected by distorting influence. … [I]f anything would survive, it is likely to be far more counterintuitive than anything dreamed of by utilitarians. Perhaps we would need to reject the very normativity of well-being, or at least replace our current attitudes to pleasure, pain, health and death with an especially elevated form of perfectionism. These are only speculations, but, worrisomely, the view that emerges in outline is more Nietzsche than Singer. (2011: 120)[12]

We cannot tailor debunking to support utilitarianism (or any other view for that matter) without threatening to debunk our views about well-being. Likewise, Parfit risks undermining his own edifice by attempting to debunk Nietzsche. To be sure, evolutionary debunking does not deny the possibility of other explanations of our attitudes. For example, we could appeal to a certain sort of reliable faculty. Yet, as I argue in the next section, it falls prey to another objection from epistemically defective processes.

8. Opacity

Parfit argues that the belief that everyone's well-being matters equally could not have been reproductively advantageous; instead, we have it and other beliefs because, as rational beings, we were able to recognize their truth (OWM III 340; cf. Lazari-Radek and Singer 2013; 2017). But this response only works if we presuppose the existence and

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[12] Cf. Kahane (2014: 330-2). Kahane (2016) cautiously claims that pain is inherently bad with an argument similar to that reviewed in section 8. But his 2011 and 2014 articles clearly express doubts about the realist strategy.

intuitive accessibility of some basic fact. The strategy relies on the reliability of introspective access to the badness of suffering. In this section, I evaluate the strategy and argue that it fails.

According to Ben Bramble, the explanation offered by Street above does not show that *believing* that pain is bad increases our fitness; the belief is superimposed on a prior and sufficiently motivating *aversion* to pain (2017: 97; cf. OWM II 527-8). Such beliefs, Bramble argues, are "*the hardest* to debunk." (p. 96) He suggests that their best explanation is our ability to perceive the intrinsic axiological quality of pain and pleasure. The fact that our physiological dispositions admit of evolutionary explanations is irrelevant to the truth of our beliefs; the reason we came to form them, on the other hand, does have to do with their truth. Because we were already sufficiently motivated, we could not have developed such beliefs through evolutionary adaptations. Instead, our beliefs are best explained by the truth to which they gave our ancestors access.

Similarly, Neil Sinhababu (manuscript; cf. Lazari-Radek and Singer 2013: 267) argues that we can discover the badness of pain by simply experiencing it: "Phenomenal introspection, a reliable way of forming true beliefs about our experiences, produces the belief that pleasure is good" (p. 18[13]) (or pain bad). Sinhababu assumes the reliability of phenomenal introspection and argues that our intuitive judgments about the badness (goodness) of our pain (pleasure) generalize: "Even though the only pleasure I can introspect is mine now, I should believe that others' pleasures and my pleasures at other times are good ..." (p. 23)

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[13] Page numbers refer to the typescript available at https://philpapers.org/archive/SINTEA-3.pdf

Sinhababu's argument is an answer to the sort of arguments marshalled by Joyce and Street. On his view, phenomenal introspection is

> a process of belief-formation that evolved to be generally reliable, like visual perception. … [C]reatures who could reliably form true beliefs about their phenomenal states would be more likely to survive and reproduce. Hedonism withstands evolutionary debunking arguments via what Street calls a "byproduct hypothesis." Since belief in pleasure's goodness is a byproduct of phenomenal introspection, which is selected for reliability, it's reliably caused even if other moral beliefs aren't. (ibid.)

Sinhababu assumes that our hedonic starting points are not contaminated. This response to debunking thus relies on the same epistemic principle as debunking, picking out a reliable process that leads us to the intrinsic badness of suffering.

Alas, the strategy runs into new problems that the broadly Nietzschean approach brings out. We can begin by noting that Nietzsche's view has found empirical support in the psychological literature and is echoed by a growing number of philosophical accounts of the limits of introspection. The thesis at odds with the introspective strategy is what Mattia Riccardi (2015) calls *Inner Opacity*.

One version of this objection is Eric Schwitzgebel's (2008) two-fold view: (i) that introspection is a multifarious composite of cognitive processes rather than a single unified faculty, typically failing to yield an informative judgment about the nature of our experiences; (ii) that whenever we do gain information, it is more often than not inaccurate or ambiguous, hence that introspection is generally unreliable. Schwitzgebel notes how difficult it is to know whether, say, joy has a single, distinctive, experiential

character, and the same generalizes other affective states. Nietzsche holds a version of (i) and (ii) (cf. D 35; GS 354; Riccardi 2015). But even (ii) is sufficient to undermine the introspective strategy. As Schwitzgebel writes,

> Most people are poor introspectors of their own ongoing conscious experience. We fail not just in assessing the causes of our mental states or the processes underwriting them; and not just in our judgments about nonphenomenal mental states like traits, motives, and skills; and not only when we are distracted, or passionate, or inattentive, or self-deceived, or pathologically deluded, or when we're reflecting about minor matters, or about the past, or only for a moment, or where fine discrimination is required. We are both ignorant and prone to error. … even in favorable circumstances of careful reflection, with distressing regularity. (2008: 247)

Schwitzgebel is sceptical that any unified account of the introspective phenomenology of not just affective but most mental states is forthcoming.[14]

Could pain be an exception? Sinhababu suggests that Schwitzgebel thinks so (p. 19). But this is a partial reading. In fact, Schwitzgebel writes about this "favorite example for optimists about introspection",

> to use these cases only as one's inference base rigs the game. And the case of pain is not always as clear as sometimes supposed. There's confusion between mild pains and itches or tingles. There's the football player who sincerely denies he's

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[14] Another critic of introspection is less skeptical. Carruthers (2010) emphasizes the unreliability of introspective access to judgments and decisions, but not perceptual states. But this only provides comfort for accessing perceptual states since introspecting the value of suffering implies a *representation* of its badness (cf. Carruthers 2018). Engelbert and Carruthers (2010: 251) note the limited amount of data on introspection, in contrast to the abundant research documenting confabulation effects.

hurt. There's the difficulty we sometimes feel in locating pains precisely or in describing their character. I see no reason to dismiss, out of hand, the possibility of genuine introspective error in these cases. (2008: 259-60)

Sinhababu also notes that Schwitzgebel's purported counterexamples show "that false beliefs about our experiences can be formed by reasoning about what we're likely to believe in a given situation, and not by phenomenal introspection." (p. 19) That is, our reflective judgments are prone to error, confabulation or dumbfounding. But since we cannot help but reflect on the value of our experiences to bring them to bear on our reasons, we still lack reliable introspective access to (the evaluative judgment of) the badness of pain.

Thus, in order for us to insulate judgments about the badness of suffering from debunking we cannot presuppose the reliability of the introspective route. If so, Parfit's and Lazari-Radek and Singer's rationalist response begs the question and our attitudes toward suffering remain susceptible to debunking. The worry is not just that there is an evolutionary explanation of our evaluative attitudes; we now have positive reasons to doubt the reliability of the processes through which we might have bypassed evolutionary influences. The processes are not just non-truck-tracking, they are inherently falsifying.

Rebuttals of genealogical debunking thus fail. First, even if genealogy itself does not disprove our beliefs, it undercuts their justification. Second, beliefs about the badness of suffering cannot avail themselves of the three replies to debunking discussed in sections 6-8. At the very least then, DBS does not provide a *better* explanation of our attitudes than

naturalistic explanations. In the last section, I consider an additional argument, related to *Inner Opacity*, to bolster a Nietzschean account of our attitudes.

9. Interpretation

Nietzsche conceives of moral judgments as "symptoms" or "sign-languages" of drives and affects (e.g., BGE 187; D34; 119; 542; TI, Problem, 2; Skirmishes, 37; GM, Preface, 2; Leiter 2013). That is, moral judgments are caused, and thus provide inferential evidence for, underlying drives. For Nietzsche, a claim like DBS is evidence of affective attitudes toward suffering. The diagnosis—synchronic genealogy—does not falsify the belief but casts doubt on its independence from affects by revealing an epistemically defective source. For Nietzsche, we are disposed to have certain affective responses as a result of the way our drives (roughly, our subconscious urges) are organized. Drives are inherently interpretive and determine our orientation toward the environment. Paul Katsafanas comments:

> the affect influences the perceptual saliences, causing certain features to stand out and others to recede into the background. … In deliberation, the presentation of the facts … is, at least in part, a function of the attitudes. (2013: 741)

> Drives manifest themselves by coloring our view of the world … Nietzsche's idea is that the way in which one experiences the world is, in general, determined by one's drives in a way that one typically does not grasp… (743)

This framework accounts for our judgments because affects have valence: what we value as expressed by our judgments ultimately reflects what we value as a matter of motivational forces. So affects, as primarily noncognitive states, are not truth-apt.

Other commentators argue that Nietzsche holds a two-level model of affective response. On one level, our responses involve phenomenal aspects *and* propositional attitudes. "Basic affects" are fully noncognitive, but we often display inclinations to and aversions from our basic affects, and these "*meta*-affects" may involve propositional attitudes. (Telech and Leiter 2017: 104) If so, the worry is two-fold: basic affects are not truth-apt and meta-affects are susceptible to confabulation (cf. Sec. 8 above). Further, on Nietzsche's view, it is primarily custom that imposes a particular feeling on drives which, in themselves, are evaluatively neutral. (ibid.; cf. D 38) Accordingly, the underlying affective states of suffering are in principle distinct from the meta-affects held toward it, including our judgments about its value. Drives are thus, despite their valence, "morally undetermined" (Telech and Leiter, ibid.). Only our "meta-affective stance (usually culturally shaped, and often involving beliefs) toward the basic affect" constitutes the moral valence of our sentiments (ibid.). But since we have no reason to think that this stance was shaped by reliable processes, scepticism persists.

Nietzsche's view of how our conscious moral sentiments are individuated also finds echo in the theory of emotions recently put forth by psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017), where emotions are the variable product of linguistic acculturation and inherently mediated by concepts superimposed on unindividuated affects. The individuation of different affective states under "emotion *concepts*" (predictive constructed prototypes) does not pick out universal natural kinds with unique fingerprints. The emotions we experience, like sadness or *Schadenfreude*, are shaped by our cognition and our cultural upbringing. Further, Feldman Barrett explains why we have concepts to pick out certain states but not others. For the brain, "variation is the norm." (2017: 282) When certain sensations are very intense or very frequent, we use such concepts to make sense of our

sensory inputs, but what concepts we end up with is contingent. Thus, categorization, which relies on statistical regularities and language, shapes our conscious experience of the world.

Sounds familiar? Nietzsche wrote: "[l]anguage and the prejudices upon which language is based are a manifold hindrance to us when we want to explain inner processes and drives: because of the fact, for example, that words really exist only for *superlative* degrees of those processes and drives." (D 115) "Extreme states" include "anger, hatred, love, pity, desire, knowledge, joy, pain". Our inner affective life is shaped linguistically and our concepts only crudely capture its fine-grained nature. Our folk-psychological vocabulary, accordingly, is inevitably granular. We are only introspectively aware of "extreme" or "superlative" states, and our vocabulary is mediated by social interaction within a certain community (Riccardi 2015). On Nietzsche's view, one is not "that which we appear to be in accordance with the states for which alone we have consciousness and words" (D 115). One might reply that introspection gives us access to how we feel at *some level of generalization*, but recall that there is no intrinsic, objective axiology to be accessed to begin with. Our phenomenology of pain might (with caveats) track how we really feel, but judgments about its badness either are not reliably introspectable or are constructed. The challenge, I conclude, persists.

Conclusion

Many of our beliefs are the product of non-truth-tracking processes. Both debunkers and realists agree, but the latter think our attitudes toward suffering are immune. I have argued that, even if our attitudes could be justified, it's an open question that is not settled by the intrinsic nature of suffering. Accordingly, even if *Double Badness of Suffering* were

justified, it would not vindicate *Realism about the Value of Suffering*. Suffering matters, but it does not really matter in the realist's sense. To bolster scepticism about DBS and RVS, I laid out four debunking objections—peer disagreement, genealogy, opacity, and interpretation—and argued that each response fails. Hence, RVS fails to support Parfit's prediction of normative convergence. The onus is on the realist to explain why we should opt for less parsimonious explanations when naturalistically sound accounts of our attitudes are available. I have not defended here Nietzsche's view that suffering can indeed be good for it is not critical to my argument. By parity, however, we now have reasons to take this view more seriously and to take Nietzsche as a more serious threat to convergence and realism than Parfit allows.

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