

Nietzsche's Metaethical Stance

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1. Introduction

If we think in terms of mainstream, “analytic” classifications of metaethical theories, then basically every major type of metaethical theory has been ascribed to Nietzsche. In one of the first attempts to assess Nietzsche's views on foundational questions in value theory in the light of contemporary metaethics, John Wilcox writes:

The term “metaethics” was coined after Nietzsche's time, but the issues were very much on his mind and figure prominently in his writings. ... The difficulty is not that Nietzsche did not deal with such issues. The trouble rather is that on these issues, as on so many others, Nietzsche seems so contradictory—he seems to be on both sides, or on all sides, at once. ... Consequently, a large portion of the present study ... consists of an effort to show just how complex, just how apparently contradictory, Nietzsche's metaethical suggestions are. (Wilcox 1974: 5)

I plan to follow Wilcox's lead—at least initially. I will show how a wide range of apparently conflicting metaethical theories have been ascribed to Nietzsche on the basis of his writings. I will end, however, with serious consideration of the view that perhaps Nietzsche simply does not have what we would now regard as a metaethical stance.

I will proceed by first roughly surveying the different kinds of metaethical theories currently in circulation in mainstream, “analytic” metaethics. I will then consider the initial textual evidence for ascribing each view to Nietzsche. Where there are objections to any such ascription that do *not* turn on the *relative* plausibility of ascribing this metaethical view as compared to ascribing other metaethical views, I will briefly consider such objections in the section where the ascription of that particular kind of metaethical view is discussed. I will then turn to pairwise comparative arguments in favour of claims of the relative plausibility of ascribing one metaethical interpretation to Nietzsche over another.

2. Review of Kinds of Metaethical Theories

It will help to begin with a brief review of the traditional kinds of metaethical theories even if we eventually conclude that Nietzsche’s metaethical stance does not fit neatly into these categories—as, indeed, many contemporary theories do not—or that Nietzsche does not have a metaethical stance, let alone a theory. The labels used in contemporary metaethics to mark out the logical space of metaethical theories are not particularly perspicuous. Nonetheless, to avoid too much confusion, I will follow along with the standard carving up of the logical space.¹

The sincere utterance of an indicative sentence, say, “The Eiffel Tower is in Paris,” is normally taken to be an expression of the speaker’s belief that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris.² The belief, and the proposition that is its content, is either true or false depending on whether it is indeed a fact that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris. Such views are normally classified as forms of ‘cognitivism’. The label is a somewhat odd one for several reasons, some of which will emerge

¹ In particular, I will basically follow the flow chart in Miller (2003: 8).

² Some of the basic setup here is from Hussain (2010: 336-37).

later. Cognition is a matter of knowledge and so one might think that all forms of cognitivism in metaethics involve claiming that there is moral knowledge. That is not, however, how the term is often used. Rather such views see moral language and thought as *purportedly* providing knowledge whether or not it in fact they do.³ ‘Error theories’, for example, are cognitivist metaethical theories that deny that our moral practices succeed in giving us knowledge. One form of error theory proceeds by arguing that in fact, say, nothing is right or wrong because there are no such properties. Since nothing is right or wrong, or good or bad, or just or unjust, and so on, all moral beliefs are false.⁴

We might distinguish between such error theories, which I will call “metaphysical error theories”, on the one hand, and both “presupposition error theories” and “epistemic error theories” on the other hand. Presupposition error theories, as I am defining them, do not make a metaphysical claim about the properties of rightness or wrongness themselves. Rather they focus on the presuppositions of such claims, for example, that such assessments of actions presuppose that the agent has a free will—the kind of will that, the error theorist claims, it makes no sense to believe in. Epistemic error theories focus on the fact that beliefs can be unjustified whether they are true or false. An epistemic error theorist may, for example, claim that the best explanation for why certain moral propositions are believed undermines the claim that these moral beliefs are epistemically justified.⁵

³ Further problems with the label arise when we see that positions that are normally classified as non-cognitivist turn out often to allow, in some sense, for moral knowledge.

⁴ For a more careful attempt to state the varieties of error theory, see Hussain (2010).

⁵ Cf. Hussain (2010: 337).

Within cognitivism, error theories are contrasted with forms of ‘realism’. A realist thinks that torture really is wrong—that it is a fact that torture is wrong—and so our belief that torture is wrong is true, and that, usually, our belief that torture is wrong is justified in a manner sufficient for knowledge. The nature of the fact that torture is wrong can still however be a matter of serious dispute between realists: is it part of some non-natural realm of truths? Can it be reduced to truths of history, psychology, or biology?

The possibility of the reduction to the psychological brings to the fore a related set of classificatory problems generated by certain philosophical connotations of the label ‘realism’. For some philosophers, realism is a matter of the “objective” versus the “subjective”. Consider some examples. In cricket when the ball lands beyond the boundary, 6 runs are scored. In answer to the question, “Is it true that he just scored six runs?”, one could sensible answer, in such a situation, “Yes, it is true”. It is natural to thus provide a cognitivist theory of cricket discourse: such utterances express beliefs and the belief, and the propositions that is its content, are true or false depending on whether in fact the ball landed beyond the boundary and thus whether in fact he scored 6 runs. Given our earlier discussion, we should then be realists about cricket: he really did score 6 runs.

However the use of terms like ‘fact’ and ‘realism’ in this context will already raise relevant concerns for some. Recall that the laws of cricket are officially determined by the vote of two-thirds of the members of the private Marylebone Cricket Club.⁶ This makes them seem too “subjective” and thus the use of terms such as ‘fact’ or ‘realism’ inappropriate. We do not have

⁶ The process is slightly more complicated than this, and things are changing, but not in a way that significantly affects the points being made here.

sufficient “mind-independence” as some would put it. Thus, for example, Alex Miller suggests treating realism as requiring that the relevant facts be constituted independently of human opinion in contrast with cases in which we may want to give what he calls a “judgement-dependent” account; the laws of cricket, and so the “fact” that someone scored 6 runs, depends essentially on our judgements about these matters (Miller 2003: 129). Thinking here, in contrast to cases where the label ‘realism’ is really apt, some might say, does make it so.

Consider, however, utterances that apparently express beliefs about psychological states: “He wants a *tarte aux pommes*”, “I am thinking this thought”, “You have decided to visit him”. Thinking, here too, makes it so, but these cases, or some of them, can feel different because, at least in some of these cases, the truth of the belief does not seem up to us. What makes my belief that you want an apple pie true is a fact about your psychology. That fact is “subjective” in one sense, but not in the sense in which it is somehow up to me, the one with the belief. Thinking—someone’s thinking—may make it so but my belief does not simply make it so. My beliefs are not somehow guaranteed to be true just because I have them and in this sense their truth is “objective”, or at least relatively objective.⁷

Much further discussion of these complexities would be needed in order to provide a careful exhaustive classification of cognitivist theories, and I have given no final solution to the problems of how exactly to label positions and how best to use terms such as ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ in this context. However, these comments will set the stage for some of the difficulties involved in classifying Nietzsche’s own position and we will return to these matters

⁷ Notice how “I am thinking this thought” is a bit trickier to handle. Decisions, intentions, plans, and the like, may raise additional issues that I will ignore for our purposes here.

in what follows.

Before getting to Nietzsche, however, we need to follow the other branch of our tree: not all utterances express beliefs. Commands are an obvious case. The command that the Eiffel Tower be in Paris does not express the commitment, the belief, that it is already true that this is the case. Metaethical theories differ on whether they take utterances of sentences involving moral terms to be expressions of belief. Despite the use of an indicative sentence, perhaps the utterance of “Torture is wrong” expresses the command not to torture and not a belief at all. Traditionally theories labelled ‘non-cognitivist’ are officially described as those that take moral utterances to express some attitude other than belief. This description turns out not to be perspicuous and the actual terrain turns out to be incredibly complicated. Some of these complexities will matter and we will also return to them below.

The fundamental goal of mainstream non-cognitivist theories is more specific. Traditional cognitivist theories, as we have seen, took the sincere utterance of “Torture is wrong” to express the belief that torture is wrong. The belief was then conceived of as an attitude, a commitment to the truth of the proposition, that torture is wrong, towards which it is directed. For non-cognitivism it is not sufficient simply to posit that some attitude other than belief is directed at the proposition that torture is wrong—we will consider such a view when we consider “fictionalism”, the view according to which we would pretend, or imagine, that torture is wrong. Any such view would still have to address the question of whether the proposition itself was true or not. Non-cognitivism hopes to deny that there is anything here that is truth-apt, whether an attitude or a proposition that the attitude is directed at. The analogy with commands is thus instructive. It is not just a matter of not having beliefs; it is the matter of ensuring that there is nothing there to be true or false.

Contemporary non-cognitivism, as we shall see, add even more complexity to this picture since they claim that though at the most fundamental level the traditional non-cognitivist starting point is essentially right, we can eventually both explain and vindicate our inclinations to talk of moral belief and moral truth. Thus according to contemporary non-cognitivism, we will indeed be able to say that we have moral beliefs, that many of these beliefs are true and even that we have moral knowledge; however, what we are doing when we say such things will turn out to be rather different than what we might have thought: it will still be a matter, underneath it all, of expressing non-cognitive attitudes towards non-normative contents.

3. Error Theory

As I noted in the introduction, Nietzsche has been interpreted as having some form of almost every one of the metaethical theory types outlined in the previous section. We will start though with the natural thought that Nietzsche's famous criticisms of Christianity and morality should be interpreted as presenting an error theory.⁸ Nietzsche writes:

My demand upon the philosopher is known, that he take his stand *beyond* good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment *beneath* himself. This demand follows from an insight which I was the first to formulate: that *there are altogether no moral facts*. Moral judgments agree with religious ones in believing in realities which are no realities. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena—more precisely a misinterpretation. Moral judgments, like religious ones, belong to a stage of ignorance at which ... "truth," ... designates all sorts of things which we today call "imaginings". (TI "Improvers" 1).

A crucial feature of this passage is the analogy to religion. Presumably the problem with the rel-

⁸ I draw here extensively on (Hussain 2007).

evant religious judgments is that they involve belief in God, angels, the divine, heaven, hell, the sacred, blessed, sin, etc.—”realities which are no realities”. The failure of religious judgments is systematic in virtue of a systematic mismatch between the basic terms of the discourse and what is actually part of reality. Thus one problem with the judgment that God is triune is that ‘God’ simply fails to refer to any part of reality. Whether to treat such judgments then as false or to deny them a truth value is of course an interesting matter—and indeed one could be tempted to see the fact that Nietzsche does not simply declare that such judgements are false as a recognition of this philosophical puzzle—but that we should have an error theory of some kind for the discourse in question seems clear.⁹ In the moral case what could the “realities” in question be? Well, continuing with the analogy, perhaps there are no such properties as rightness or wrongness, good or bad, and so on. These are the “realities” which moral judgments believe in. Again, the systematicity of the error would ground some kind of error theory.

One can try to argue that this passage does not support an error theory of this kind by arguing that what Nietzsche is alluding to is the fact that moral judgements have certain *presuppositions*. To judge that what an agent did was morally wrong, for example, is to presuppose that the agent was, in some metaphysically problematic sense, free to choose otherwise. The reality that is not a reality is the reality of, here, free will. Rightness, wrongness, and so on, are not themselves under threat and thus we can accept Nietzsche’s claims without ascribing to him a metaethical error theory since we do not have to ascribe to him the view that there is no such thing as rightness or

⁹ Evidence that Nietzsche does perhaps see the philosophical puzzle about reference comes in the sentence following the passage quoted above: “Moral judgments are therefore never to be taken literally: so understood, they always contain mere absurdity” (TI “Improvers” 1).

wrongness.

There are three points to note here. First, depending on the kind of presupposition claim defended, the resulting difference in the basic metaethical stance ascribed to Nietzsche may not be much. If talk of rightness or wrongness necessarily presupposes, for example, free will, then any talk of rightness or wrongness in our world will indeed involve an error. It is not as though there is some way to avoid the error while continuing to talk in the same way. If, on the other hand, one tried to ascribe to Nietzsche the view that the presupposition failure does not always occur, then one has to provide some other explanation—or some appropriate interpretation—of the strength of Nietzsche’s insistence that “*there are altogether no moral facts*” (TI “Improvers” 1).

Second, Nietzsche often does mention, and appeal to, the presuppositions of various practices, but here he claims that moral judgment itself believes in realities that are not realities. Despite one’s inclination to insist that judgments, as opposed to the agents who make them, cannot have beliefs, the connection of the judgment to the belief seems to be stronger than that of presupposition.¹⁰

Finally, this passage has, of course, to be read in the light of other similar passages, and these passages, I suggest, also seem to support ascribing to Nietzsche a metaphysical error theory rather than a presupposition or epistemic error theory. Thus Nietzsche writes:

Astrology and what is related to it.—It is probable that the objects of the religious, moral and aesthetic sensations belong only to the surface of things, while man likes to believe

¹⁰ The German reads, “Das moralische Urtheil hat Das mit dem religiösen gemein, dass es an Realitäten glaubt, die keine sind” (KSA 6: 98).

that here at least he is in touch with the world's heart; the reason he deludes himself is that these things produce in him such profound happiness and unhappiness, and thus he exhibits here the same pride as in the case of astrology. For astrology believes the starry firmament revolves around the fate of man; the moral man, however, supposes that that what he has essentially at heart must also constitute the essence and heart of things. (HAH I:4).

There is again here the analogy between morality and religion. This time in addition we get the comparison to astrology, a domain whose claims Nietzsche would surely take as deserving an error theory. There are puzzles to which I shall return about whether this passage ultimately does support error theory at all, but to the degree that it does, it seems, for the reasons considered already, to support a metaphysical error theory.

Also in HAH, Nietzsche writes:

Injustice necessary.—All judgements as to the value of life have evolved illogically and are therefore unjust. The falsity of human judgement ... is so with absolute necessity. ... Perhaps it would follow from all this that one ought not to judge at all; if only it were possible to *live* without evaluating, without having aversions and partialities! – for all aversion is dependent on an evaluation, likewise all partiality. A drive to something or away from something divorced from a feeling one is desiring the beneficial or avoiding the harmful, a drive without some kind of knowing evaluation of the worth of its objective, does not exist in man. (HAH 32).

Note that though this passage begins with what seems like a more restricted class of judgements—judgements about the value of life—by the end of the passage it is clear that the target is *all value* judgements. They all involve error.

Consider much later passages from the *Nachlass*:

All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves ... all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things. (WP 12 [November 1887-March 1888])

Elsewhere he writes: “In the entire evolution of morality, truth never appears: all the conceptual elements employed are fictions” (WP 428 [1888]).

Nietzsche emphasizes the centrality of such thoughts in the following passage:

It is only late that one musters the courage for what one really knows. That I have hitherto been a thorough-going nihilist, I have admitted to myself only recently: the energy and radicalism with which I have advanced as a nihilist deceived me about this basic fact.

When one moves toward a goal it seems impossible that ‘goal-lessness as such’ is the principle of our faith. (WP 25 [Spring-Fall 1887])¹¹

The nihilism here does seem to be very much the nihilism that claims that there is nothing that gives any direction to life. If some realm of normative or evaluative injunctions were independent of these considerations, then talk of thorough-going nihilism would seem misplaced. In those

¹¹ Cf. “mankind has as a whole *no* goal”. Nietzsche also writes here of the “ultimate goallessness of man” (HAH I:33). “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer” (WP 2 [Spring-Fall 1887]). Note that, given the relevant dates—and like the passages from TI—these WP passages cannot be treated simply as the reflections just of an earlier “positivistic” Nietzsche, a point I will return to later.

limited domains, there would indeed be something we should do, or that would be good to do, and so the nihilism would be limited: in some domains there would indeed be goals. Many of the above passages support seeing all value judgments as being in error. The context of TI “Improvers” 1 makes clear that a vast range of positions is included: Manu, Confucius, Plato, Judaism and Christianity.¹²

4. Revolutionary Fictionalism

Ascribing a global metaethical error theory to Nietzsche does face some serious problems, however. Famously Nietzsche himself regularly, and stridently, makes what certainly look like normative and evaluative judgments. He also regularly champions the creation of new values: “Toward *new philosophers*; there is no choice; towards spirits strong and original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert ‘eternal values’” (BGE 203). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for example, is oriented around just such hopes for new values and the creators of new values.¹³ If indeed Nietzsche thought that all evaluative and normative judgements involve serious error, then why would he think it makes sense to continue to make value judge-

¹² Here I repeat points made in my forthcoming article, “Nietzsche and Non-Cognitivism” (Hussain forthcoming-b). It is an interesting question whether Nietzsche’s own position is included, a matter we will return to in the section below on fictionalism.

¹³ “Fellow creators, the creator seeks—those who write new values on new tablets” (Z P:9). Or see the discussion of how the lion cannot do what the child is needed for, namely, “[t]o create new values” (Z I: “On the Three Metamorphoses”). See also GS 55, 320, 335; Z:1 “On the Thousand and One Goals”; BGE 211; TI P; A, in particular 13; EH “Destiny” 1; WP 260, 972, 979, 999. See (Schacht 1983: 466-69).

ments?

One way to deal with this puzzle is to insist on a distinction between some domain of normative and evaluative judgements for which Nietzsche is proposing an error theory and another domain for which he is proposing some other account, an alternative account that, unlike error theory, would allow it to make sense to continue to make value judgments. At the end of the previous section, we raised some textual worries about accounts that attempted to draw such a line between existing practices of normative and evaluative judgements. However we could distinguish between the task of giving the correct metaethical account of current, and perhaps past, moral judgements, on the one hand, and giving the metaethical account of a proposed replacement practice, on the other.

Elsewhere, I have argued that if we focus on what I claimed were the close connections drawn in Nietzsche's works between art, the avoidance of nihilism, and the creation of value, then we should see Nietzsche as suggesting a replacement practice for which the correct account would normally be considered a form of "fictionalism" (Hussain 2007). Understanding what fictionalism might involve requires returning to our earlier discussion of error theory. For many of us an error theory was presumably true of our childhood beliefs about Santa Claus. However, instead of simply no longer bothering to talk or think about Santa Claus, many of us end up replacing our belief in Santa Claus with an elaborate pretense involving imagining him coming down chimneys and living at the North Pole.¹⁴ A couple of crucial features of fictionalism need to be noted. One, it is easy to see how the transition from belief to pretense can occur. The transition does not, at least not obviously, require fundamental linguistic reform. We all know

¹⁴ Here I draw on my discussion of "revolutionary fictionalism" in (Hussain 2010).

what it is to believe that John is upstairs, realize that this belief is false, but continue to pretend that he is upstairs. One way of accounting for the relative ease of such a transition is to say that the content of the propositional attitudes, that John is upstairs, remains constant here; the attitude towards this proposition changes from belief to imagining or pretending. The other crucial feature that needs to be noted is that no general, automatic charge of inconsistency or incoherence applies to someone who both believes that a proposition is false and continues to pretend that it is true. We can knowingly pretend what we know is not the case.

I then argued that Nietzsche was concerned to avoid “practical nihilism” (Hussain 2007: 161, 166-67). Practical nihilism is the practical consequence in most agents of the belief, usually only a tacit belief, in valuelessness or goallessness—in an error theory for all our normative and evaluative judgements. This recognition of valuelessness emaciates the fundamental drives and desires that provide psychological unity and strength to the agent.¹⁵ Nietzsche wants to create higher men that will somehow rise above this practical nihilism. However, part of what it is to be these free spirits and higher men, I suggested, is to “conceive reality *as it is*” (EH “Destiny” 5).¹⁶ Self-deception is thus not an option. What these higher men need to do is to find a way of

¹⁵ One consequence of this can be the ‘last men’ famously depicted in *Z* who retain some unity and ability to act but only in virtue, I suggest, of taking themselves to be pursuing a thin notion of the good that is somehow supposed to be unproblematic—one need here only think of many of our contemporaries who think that desire-satisfaction theories, in one form or the other, somehow avoid metaethical problems precisely because of such supposed thinness.

¹⁶ See also GS 2, 110, 283; *Z*:2 “The Stillest Hour”:2; BGE 230; A 50; EH P:3, “Destiny” 3; WP 172 [Spring-Fall 1887].

regarding things as valuable while knowing that in fact they are not. I suggested that the “honest illusions” of art provided a way forward by allowing us to create illusions of value:

What one should learn from artists.— How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in themselves they never are. Here we should learn something from physicians, when for example they dilute what is bitter or add wine and sugar to a mixture—but even more from artists who are really continually trying to bring off such inventions and feats. Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to see them at all; or seeing things around a corner and as cut out and framed; or to place them so that they partially conceal each other and grant us only glimpses of architectural perspective; or looking at them through tinted glass or in the light of the sunset; or giving them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent—all that we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters. (GS 299)

This passage brings to the fore an essential feature of the view I wanted to ascribe to Nietzsche. What is essential is for the illusion of value to play the appropriate motivational role. This in turn requires that it engage agents in the proper way. Part of this engagement is to recreate some simulacrum of the phenomenology of evaluative experience. Nietzsche emphasizes the ways in which evaluations “color” things: “The extent of moral evaluations: they play a part in almost every sense impression. Our world is *colored* by them” (WP 260 [1883-1888]). It is some version of this phenomenology that needs to be recreated for the higher men.

This is where the label ‘fictionalism’ can be misleading. It suggests that the fictions are easy

to come by. “Just imagine for a moment that there is an elephant in the room”, we say in the middle of concocting a philosophical example. However, I wanted to emphasize that the aim of Nietzsche’s revaluations was to create honest *illusions* of value.¹⁷ Illusions are different from mere pretences. Merely pretending that the fork in the glass is bent is different from the illusion of a bent fork in a glass of water, an illusion that for most of us is an honest illusion, one by which we are not deceived. Creating an honest illusion of value thus requires much more than merely pretending that something is of value in some way. Passages like GS 299 are meant to suggest how one might achieve such illusions.

5. Rejecting Metaphysical Independence¹⁸

In the discussion above of a revolutionary fictionalist reading of Nietzsche, I emphasized passages that talk about our ability to create values. Consider again GS 299. The fictionalist reading focuses on the visual metaphors that suggest that one is not simply viewing the object in question as it actually is. Consider the following suggestion in that passage: “Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to seem them at all” (GS 299). The fictionalist sees this as suggesting that despite such manoeuvres, the thing itself does not become “beautiful, attractive, and desirable”. It just begins to look valuable even though it still is not actually valuable. The illusion of value is being generated by such manoeuvres. Such a reading, one might argue, fails to take seriously the

¹⁷ Here I repeat remarks made in my forthcoming “Nietzsche and Non-Cognitivism” (Hussain forthcoming-b).

¹⁸ I borrow talk of “metaphysical independence” from (Reginster 2006) though he is not the only one who uses it in discussions of Nietzsche.

opening line of GS 299: “How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not?”. A straightforward interpretation of the passage, given that this question is placed right at the beginning, is that what follows the question are techniques that show how we can indeed “make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable” (GS 299). Post such manoeuvres, we will count as having succeeded in making the thing *actually* beautiful, attractive, and desirable.

The fictionalist reading of this passage takes the presence of subjective elements in such manoeuvres as an indication that such manoeuvres fail to actually transform reality—actually makes things desirable or beautiful. But our opponent wonders whether their presence really supports such a reading. Rather, this opponent suggests, we should look for a way to take seriously the metaphor present in other related passages:

We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually *fashion* something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. ... Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present—and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it. (GS 301)

When a gift is given to someone, the recipient really does have the gift. Normally no fiction involved.

The role of these passages rather is to reject the idea that values are, in some supposedly problematic sense, independent of us. Or at least to reject the ideas that *all* values *are* this way or *need* to be this way. The idea that some values are not problematically independent of us in this manner is compatible with the thought that other values, or entire evaluative systems, do involve

some kind of problematic claim of independence, a claim that cannot be satisfied by anything in reality. Such views, then, reject an error theoretic interpretation of Nietzsche for at least some evaluative terms. Such an interpretation though is quite compatible with taking Nietzsche to be committed to an error theory for some other evaluative or normative terms. A natural line of interpretation is to ascribe to him an error theory for distinctively moral, in some appropriately narrow sense, evaluative and normative terms.¹⁹ For most of the discussion below, I will put aside the question of which subset of supposed evaluative properties do not purport to be problematically independent of us.

What then are the alternatives here? Start with the simplest point someone might make which is just that most things that have some value have it only because we have made them a certain way. The statue, perhaps as opposed to the lump of metal out of which it was made, is beautiful because it was shaped by us in certain ways. To put the point more technically, it is uncontroversial that many objects have whatever evaluative property they have, beauty say, in virtue of other non-evaluative properties, their shape. These other non-evaluative properties are ones that we are causally responsible for. It would indeed be controversial to claim that all cases of things having value are like this because that would be to deny, for example, that sunsets cannot be beautiful unless we are somehow responsible for the features that make them beautiful. The glows of some beautiful sunsets no doubt are the result of dust clouds, or pollution, generated by humans, but surely it would be implausible to claim that something like this is necessary in order for sunsets to be beautiful.

In any case, such a view would not require some distinctive metaethical view about the

¹⁹ Cf. (Leiter 2002: 146-47).

property of beauty itself—would not require having a view about the nature of evaluative properties in general. One could add on such an odd commitment to any type of existing metaethical theory. More importantly for our purposes, this reading of this line of passages in Nietzsche seems not to capture what does feel like the metaethical import that these passages are after. As Nietzsche seems to emphasize, it is we who somehow make “the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives ...”. It is not that we reshape things so that they now fall under an existing order of valuations. Rather, that there is value at all is what we are, surprisingly, responsible for. And this, indeed, sounds like metaethics.

Mentioning the implausible reading was important, though, because it allows us to see what we need to avoid if we are to give Nietzsche a distinctive metaethical stance here.²⁰ Any interpretation that is compatible with a pre-existing, independent order of evaluative properties, even if we are sometimes, or always, responsible for the non-evaluative properties of things in virtue of which these evaluative properties get instantiated, is not a metaethically distinctive position.

Perhaps some examples would help here. Bernard Reginster, in his book on Nietzsche and nihilism, *The Affirmation of Life*, takes the kind of metaphysical independence being rejected by Nietzsche in these passages as “most evident in the case of divine command theory and Platonic realism” (Reginster 2006: 57). As he puts it, “[i]f the value of compassion is a divine decree, or a Platonic Form, then its nature” (Reginster 2006: 57) is independent in the manner objectionable to Nietzsche. This example helps us get clear on a crucial matter. Presumably if compassion is

²⁰ As promised, I will return to the question of whether it really does make sense to interpret Nietzsche as having any metaethical stance whatsoever.

valuable or good, then being compassionate is good. And presumably if being compassionate is good, then my being compassionate is good. Finally, if I am systematically compassionate, and am not bad in other ways, you might well be willing to conclude that I am a good person. Now consider the claim:

(1) Nadeem's a good person.

Since compassion is a matter of my having a certain kind of concern for others, it is a matter of something about my mind, of something subjective. And so *part* of what makes (1) true are my particular subjective mental states. Its truth thus does depend on my subjective mental states. Nonetheless, as this example should make clear, *this* kind of dependence on the subjective is hardly a denial of some pre-existing, independent, "metaphysical" order of evaluative properties since it is compatible with the supposedly most evident instances of such a view, namely, one's where compassion's goodness is a matter of a divine decree or a Platonic form. My motivational states may be part of what makes (1) true but crucially its truth also depends on other things. It depends on a divine decree or Platonic form, properties or relations whose existence and whose rules of instantiation, so to speak, are not up to me.

Now we can see that just any old dependence of evaluative or normative truths on us will not be sufficient to constitute an interesting metaethical view. What we need is, in some sense or the other, for the very existence of the evaluative properties themselves to be a result of, or necessarily involve, us, our attitudes, or our activities.

There is a range of views that will attempt to do just this. We will start with what I will call forms of (naturalistic) reductive subjective realism. Such theories attempt to reduce evaluative properties to subjective, psychological, and usually, in some broad sense, naturalistic properties. Being valuable just is being the object, in one way or the other, of our actual or counterfactual

motivational states.²¹ These are not forms of eliminativist, error-theoretic reductions. Things really are valuable. They really do have, say, the property of being good. But that property is a naturalistic property, it is the property of being the object, in one way or the other, of our motivational states.

After considering various forms of subjective realism and the somewhat complex philosophical and interpretive issues surrounding which version, if any, to ascribe to Nietzsche, I will turn to a rather different kind of use of our subjective, mental states for metaethical purposes, namely, an attempt to develop a non-cognitivist interpretation of Nietzsche.

6. Reductive Subjective Realism

Recall that the problem with simply ascribing an error theory to Nietzsche was that he often does seem to make evaluative judgements in his own voice. The motivation I gave in the previous section for considering forms of subjective realism was the role we seemed to play in the generation of values in Nietzsche's reflections about the nature of values. The first form of subjective realism we will take a look at here, though, begins by focussing on the first-order evaluative claims Nietzsche seems to make in his own voice.²²

²¹ Recall that this is to be contrasted with the non-metaethical view according to which evaluative properties are such that they are instantiated in virtue of, but are not reduced to, our motivations.

²² The material that follows in this section draws extensively on (Hussain forthcoming-c). It should be emphasized that there I avoid making claims about which metaethical view we should ascribe to Nietzsche. Nonetheless, much of the material used for the interpretive line run in that article can be used for the admittedly far more speculative metaethical interpretations developed

6.1 Will to Power Interpretation

Nietzsche's own evaluative claims are often made in the context precisely of some kind of rejection of other values.²³ Nietzsche took as one of his central tasks something he called a "revaluation [*Umwertung*] of all values". It is not, as we shall see, exactly clear what this involves for Nietzsche. But certainly part of what it involves is an assessment of the value of a range of traditional values. Often these are labelled as Christian values but it is relatively clear that the problematic values that play a central role in Christianity do appear, according to Nietzsche, in other traditions as we saw at the end of the section on error theory above. At times Nietzsche just seems to use the term 'morality' [*Moral*'] to identify his target.²⁴ Christianity itself, as Nietzsche famously argues, is a revaluation of even older, perhaps more, in some sense, natural values. Nietzsche's job is to assess Christian values for the purposes, or so it initially seems, of revaluing our values where this might well include demoting, in some sense, Christian values and replacing them with others. This all makes it sound as though there must be some fundamental evaluative standard that Nietzsche is using in order to assess the value, as he puts it, of the values, the value judgments, of morality:

[U]nder what conditions did man invent the value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves have?* Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human

here.

²³ This does not require ascribing to him an error theory about those other values, but it is, as we have seen already, natural to do so.

²⁴ In addition to GM in general, see D P:4 and EH "Destiny" 1. See also the end note on the title of GM, in the edition by Clark and Swensen.

flourishing [*Gedeihen*]? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future? (GM P:3)

Later in the same preface he writes:

[W]e need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined* [...] People have taken the *value* of these ‘values’ as given, as factual, as beyond all questioning; up till now, nobody has had the remotest doubt or hesitation in placing higher value on the ‘good man’ than on ‘the evil’, higher value in the sense of advancement, benefit and prosperity [*Gedeihlichkeit*] for man in general (and this includes man’s future). What if the opposite were true? [...] So that morality itself were to blame if man, as species, [*des Typus Mensch*] never reached his *highest potential power and splendour*? (GM P:6)

One kind of assessment being made is relatively clear. We are to assess the values of morality instrumentally: do they promote human flourishing? What is less clear is precisely what is meant by human flourishing. Obviously it has something to do with power and splendour. Flourishing also seems to be connected to something called “life” where life is being conceived of as something that can be stronger or weaker, degenerating or growing, confident or in distress.

Consider the focus in GM, P, 3 on the values of morality as symptoms of the condition of life.

The fundamental evaluative standard here seems to be one which assesses systems of evaluations in terms of whether they allow the emergence of humans that are truly flourishing which then seems to be equated with achieving the “*highest potential power and splendour*” (GM P:6). What we need to get clear on then is what this way of being is like since that is what seems to be of fundamental value in Nietzsche’s assessments of all other values.

It is, one must admit, not exactly clear what it is to flourish in Nietzsche's way, but a series of passages where Nietzsche talks about what he regards positively, gives us some clues:

But from time to time grant me [...] a glimpse, grant me just one glimpse of something perfect, completely finished, happy, powerful, triumphant, that still leaves something to fear! (GM I:12)

Nietzsche claims that "the plant 'man' has so far grown most vigorously to a height" not in the absence of suffering but in the "opposite conditions":

his power of invention and simulation (his "spirit") had to develop under prolonged pressure and constraint into refinement and audacity, his life-will had to be enhanced into an unconditional power-will. (BGE 44)

Or here is another passage from BGE that, precisely because it focuses on compassion [*Mitleid*], an attitude that normally comes under withering criticism for the danger it poses to the development of humans, seems to give us insight into the kind of person that has succeeded in achieving splendour and power:

A man who says, "I like this, I take this for my own and want to protect it and defend it against anybody"; a man who is able to manage something, to carry out a resolution, to remain faithful to a thought, to hold a woman, to punish and prostrate one who presumed too much; a man who has his wrath and his sword and to whom the weak, the suffering, the hard pressed, and the animals, too, like to come and belong by nature [*gern zufallen und von Natur zugehören*], in short a man who is by nature a *master*—when such a man has pity, well, *this* pity has value. (BGE 293)

We should also consider his condemnations of Christianity as a conspiracy "against health, beauty, whatever has turned out well, courage, spirit, *graciousness* of the soul" (A 62). The "true

Christian” opposes “the beautiful, the splendid, the rich, the proud, the self-reliant, the knowledgeable, the powerful—in summa, the whole of culture” (WP 250).²⁵

One can worry about how much of a substantive ideal emerges. After all, often the right hand side, so to speak, moves within the same worryingly small cluster of concepts. The sustained discussions of all the ways of being that Nietzsche finds bad are perhaps more helpful. Those negative comments can raise the worry one has with “negative theology”—is there really a way of being that avoids all those criticisms? Nonetheless, I think that as long as we work hard to put aside our temptations to defang Nietzsche on the behalf of morality, we can, so to speak, go on: we can, that is, tell what Nietzsche would take to be instances of human power and splendour and, with some confidence, to rank these instances.

Part of what comes through in the above passages, one might think, is that for Nietzsche the cluster of evaluations in terms of power, vigour, self-reliance, health, creativity, intelligence, a strong will, and so on, hang together. We must understand why he thought that even if we eventually conclude that in fact they do not hang together in the way Nietzsche thinks they do. One traditional way of seeing the unity in such lists is to think of “power” as the umbrella notion. After all, health, creativity, intelligence, a strong will, and so on can be seen as part of what it would take for a human to have power over himself and his environment. This is the kind of reading that gets support from passages such as these:

What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself.

What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness. (A 2)

²⁵ See also D 201; GM I 7; WP 873 943 936 949.

Or from the *Nachlaß*:

What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power. (WP 674).²⁶

All this does suggest that power—understood as an “umbrella” notion for a range of related features of flourishing humans—is indeed the fundamental value or standard that Nietzsche uses for the purposes of assessing other values: whether something enhances or diminishes power determines its value. However, we do not yet have any reason to ascribe to Nietzsche any particular metaethical view on the basis of this. Indeed, though the view that Nietzsche’s fundamental value or standard is that of power has been widely held, rarely has a metaethical position been developed from it.²⁷

²⁶ See also WP 858.

²⁷ “Power, then, is the standard of value which Nietzsche affirms with all the eloquence at his command” (Morgan 1965: 118). The “quantitative degree of power is the measure of value” (Kaufmann 1974: 200). There is “one standard about which Nietzsche does not take a relativist position. He evaluates the worth of persons on the basis of a single standard: the degree to which they have attained what he calls power” (Hunt 1991: 131). “Nietzsche’s advice: maximize power” (Richardson 1996: 148). See also (Wilcox 1974: 194-196), (Schacht 1983: 349, 398), and (May 1999: 15).

Contrast any metaethical view with the more straightforward normative view that the central good-making feature in the world is power: it is in virtue of power, or the lack thereof, that things are better or worse, good or bad.

One can begin to think that there is a metaethical view lurking here, when one considers claims like the following:

There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power. (WP 55)

Nietzsche, furthermore, does at least at times accept this assumption. Indeed, seems to commit himself to an even stronger doctrine of the will to power:

Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength—life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*. (BGE, 13)

Or, the most dramatically:

This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! (WP 1067)²⁸

All of life, or perhaps everything, is always striving for power. Once power appears as the central evaluative *and* ontological term, then it can hardly appear to be a coincidence that everything aims at power and that power also turns out to be what is good. Surely, one is tempted to think, Nietzsche believes that power is valuable somehow because everything aims at power.

It is the basic connection between life and power that will be essential to seeing how we might ascribe a metaethical view here to Nietzsche. Schacht writes that Nietzsche “takes ‘life’ in this world to be the sole locus of value, and its preservation, flourishing, and above all its enhancement to be ultimately decisive for determinations of value” (Schacht 1983: 359). “In the last analysis, value can only be ‘value for life,’ and can only be understood in terms of what life

²⁸ Cf. BGE 22 and 36.

essentially involves” (367). Of course, for Schacht, “Life, as [Nietzsche] construes it, *is* ‘will to power’ in various forms—an array of processes all which are ‘developments and ramifications’ of this basic tendency” (367).²⁹

The problem with morality, with other values, is that they contribute to declining, weakening life, to what Nietzsche labels “decadence”:

Nothing has preoccupied me more profoundly than the problem of decadence “Good and Evil” is merely a variation of that problem. Once one has developed a keen eye for the symptom of decline, one understands morality, too—one understands what is hiding under its most sacred names and value formulas: impoverished life, the will to the end, the great weariness. Morality negates life. (CW “Preface”)

This is to be contrasted with master moralities that do serve ascending life and power:

In the [...] sphere of so-called moral values one cannot find a greater contrast than that between a *master* morality and the morality of *Christian* value concepts: the latter developed on soil that was morbid through and through [...], master morality (“Roman,” “pagan,” “classical,” “Renaissance”) is, conversely, the sign language of what has turned out well, of *ascending* life, of the will to power as the principle of life. (CW “Epilogue”)

As Nietzsche puts it, “life itself” is the “instinct for growth, for durability, for an accumulation of forces, for *power*” (A 6). It is important not to think that there is some particular mental state like a desire that has power as its aim in each living creature. Rather a plausible will to power interpretation has to take talk of the will to power as a statement of the fundamental tendency, a tendency that is essential to life, towards expansion, domination, growth, overcoming

²⁹ Cf. (Schacht 1983: 396)

resistances, increasing strength—shorthand: power. This becomes clear in passages such as the following:

The democratic idiosyncrasy of being against everything that dominates and wants to dominate ... has already become master of the whole of physiology and biology, to their detriment, naturally, by spiriting away their basic concept, that of actual *activity*. On the other hand, the pressure of this idiosyncrasy forces ‘adaptation’ into the foreground, which is a second-rate activity, just a reactivity, indeed life itself has been defined as an increasingly efficient inner adaptation to external circumstances (Herbert Spencer). But this is to misunderstand the essence of life, its *will to power*, we overlook the prime importance that the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing and formative forces have, which ‘adaptation’ follows only when they have had their effect; in the organism itself, the dominant role of these highest functionaries, in whom the lifewill is active and manifests itself, is denied. (GM, II, 12)³⁰

³⁰ Cf. “Every animal [...] instinctively strives for an optimum of favourable conditions in which to fully release his power and achieve his maximum of power-sensation; every animal abhors equally instinctively [...] any kind of disturbance and hindrance that blocks or could block his path to the optimum (—it is *not* his path to ‘happiness’ I am talking about, but the path to power, action, the mightiest deeds, and in most cases, actually, his path to misery)” (GM, III, 7). “what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life” (GS, P, 2). Cf. BGE 259: “life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation [...] life

The real will to power doctrine, it seems, is a doctrine about what is essential to life.³¹ To be alive is, in part, at least, to have a tendency towards expansion, growth, domination, overcoming of resistances, increasing strength, and so on. It is this picture of life, and the accompanying fundamental evaluative standard, that is present even where Nietzsche does not use the reductive sound locution of the “will to power”.³² To affirm life is to affirm this fundamental tendency.

simply *is* will to power. [...] ‘Exploitation’ [...] belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life”.

In a late note from the *Nachlaß*, he ascribes the will to power to an amoeba, hardly a case where it is plausible to think that a particular mental states is being ascribed (KSA 13: 14[174]).

³¹ I suggest that the passages from the *Nachlaß* and BGE that are often quoted to ascribe to Nietzsche a very strong form of the will to power doctrine should be interpreted as signs that Nietzsche was indeed occasionally tempted to a more reductive and extreme doctrine. The use though of the notion of life as involving some fundamental tendency towards growth, exploitation, domination, increase of strength is far more widespread as the rest of the passages quoted throughout this section show.

³² Once we see the close connection between notions such as “life”, “power”, and “decadence”, we also have the resources to allay Leiter’s concerns about the textual support for any such will-to-power interpretation. Leiter writes: “Indeed, if, as the defenders of the strong doctrine of will to power believe, “his fundamental principle is the ‘*will to power*’” (Jaspers 1965: 287), then it is hard to understand why he says almost nothing about will to power—and nothing at all to suggest it is his ‘fundamental principle’—in the two major self-reflective moments in the Nietzschean corpus: his last major work, *Ecce Homo*, where he reviews and

The fundamental task is to assess evaluative systems according to whether they help the fundamental instincts of life or hinder them.³³

assesses his life and writings, including specifically all his prior books [EH “Books”]; and the series of new prefaces he wrote for *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Human, All-too-Human*, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science* in 1886, in which he revisits his major themes” (Leiter 2002: 142). Now this is not completely fair since the *Antichrist*, where the value monism gets, as we have seen, its strongest expression is from after these prefaces are written. In any case, once we focus on the term ‘life’, life, and so power, do play the role one would expect of a fundamental evaluative standard in *Ecce Homo* and the new prefaces of 1886. See EH “Clever” 10, “Books” 5, BT 2-3, D 1-2, “Destiny” 7-8; BT P:2, P:4-5; HH P:1, P:6; GS P:2. See also TI “Skirmishes” 33.

³³ We should briefly consider two objections. First, this interpretation should not be read as ascribing the kind of teleological view to Nietzsche that he would disapprove of. Indeed he clearly contrasts precisely this view with a teleological view. He writes: “[L]ife itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*. In short, here as everywhere else, let us beware of *superfluous* teleological principles—one of which is the instinct of self-preservation ... Thus method, which must be essentially economy of principles, demands it” (BGE 13). There are two ways of making sense of Nietzsche’s view here. One is to interpret him as thinking of the claim that life is the will to power as teleological but not as a *superfluous* teleological claim. The second option is to ascribe to him the view that a general tendency to growth, domination, expansion, increase of strength, and so on, is simply too diffuse to count as having a *telos* in the relevant sense.

The second objection involves BGE 9 where Nietzsche mocks the Stoics for the imperative

For Nietzsche then there seems to be some connection between the descriptive claims about what is essential to life and the use of life as a fundamental standard for evaluating values:

Every naturalism in morality—that is, every healthy morality—is dominated by an instinct of life; some commandment of life is fulfilled by a determinate canon of “shalt” and “shalt not”; some inhibition and hostile element on the path of life is thus removed. *Anti-natural* morality—that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and preached—turns, conversely, *against* the instincts of life: it is *condemnation* of these instincts, now secret, now outspoken and impudent. (TI “Morality” 4)

A naturalist morality is one that goes along with life’s fundamental tendency to dominate. It affirms this tendency and looks for “shalts” and “shalt nots” that help life achieve these goals. Unlike the anti-natural morality it does not fight, it does not revolt against, the fundamental instincts of life by condemning them. Nietzsche continues:

Once one has comprehended the outrage of such a revolt against life as has become almost sacrosanct in Christian morality, one has, fortunately, also comprehended something else: the futility, apparentness, absurdity, and *mendaciousness* of such a revolt. A condemnation of life by the living remains in the end a mere symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether it is justified or unjustified is not even raised thereby. One would require a position *outside* of life, and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the *value* of life: reasons

“live according to life”. As Nietzsche says, “how could you *not* do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?”. As the discussion below should show, this in fact can be interpreted as eventually supporting this interpretation rather than undermining it.

enough to comprehend that this problem is for us an unapproachable problem. When we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life [*unter der Optik des Lebens*]: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values. From this it follows that even that anti-natural morality which conceives of God as the counter-concept and condemnation of life is only a value-judgment of life—but of what life? of what kind of life? I have already given the answer: of declining, weakened, weary, condemned life. (TI “Morality” 5)

Such passages suggest a kind of naturalism about values that was quite widespread among late nineteenth-century thinkers and remains influential among contemporary naturalists.³⁴ Once we really see ourselves as natural creatures—once, to use Nietzsche’s language, we “translate man back into nature” (BGE 230)—then we have to look for direction from nature. Where else could one look? And nature has constituted us, at the most fundamental levels, in certain ways. One would have reason to act against our natural constitution only on the basis of some set of commands or injunctions from beyond nature and that is precisely what we give up when we give up the idea of a metaphysically independent order of values. What we always are already in the business of valuing is, to again use Nietzsche’s shorthand, power.

This is true, Nietzsche crucially seems to think, even in cases where the values espoused by a particular group of people or at a particular time in history reject power, or actually seem to hamper, in certain ways, the enhancement of power. GM, for example, can be plausibly read as showing that even the occurrence of value judgements that condemn life, condemn life precisely by condemning tendencies to dominate, subjugate, grow and so on, is to be explained by

³⁴ I make some attempt to defend this claim elsewhere (Hussain forthcoming-c).

appealing to the fundamental tendency that is life to grow, to dominate, and so on. GM does this by providing an extended study of how this essential tendency to life, when it is in life forms that are relatively weak, that cannot directly dominate their environments, that are declining in strength—in short, to use Nietzsche’s expression, in cases of decadence—this tendency of life itself generates value judgements according to which striving for power, dominating, expanding and so on are condemned. GM shows that the tendency towards power is, even in these extreme cases, inescapable.³⁵

This then suggests the possibility of interpreting Nietzsche as having a form of subjective reductive realism. It helps here to remind ourselves of a central strategy followed by contemporary metaethical naturalists aiming at a form of reductive realism that does not rely on some problematic naturalistic analysis of normative or evaluative concepts.³⁶ Such a naturalist turns to other instances of a posteriori property identification, say that of water and H₂O. Such a reduction is defended by pointing to the range of things that we tend to call ‘water’ and noting that what at the most fundamental level we seem to be in the business of tracking when we call things ‘water’ is whether or not they have the chemical structure H₂O. Talk of “fundamental level” is essential here since, of course, most samples of what we call water have all kinds of things in them besides H₂O. Similarly, then, if one wants to know what is good, what the property of goodness itself is, one looks to the things we call good and we attempt to figure out what it is at the most fundamental level that we are keeping track of. We take what is good to be

³⁵ See Hussain (forthcoming-c) for a defense of this claim.

³⁶ Problematic because of classic Moorean worries about such analyses. See chapter 2 of (Miller 2003) for a summary.

what we should pursue in the broadest sense. And, now to speak with Nietzsche, what we as living creatures pursue at the most fundamental level is, to stick to the shorthand, power.³⁷ Continuing the analogy with the case of water and H₂O, we should identify the property of being good with that of being such as to enhance power.³⁸

³⁷ WP 675: ““To have purposes, aims, intentions, *willing* in general, is the same thing as willing to be stronger, willing to grow—and, in addition, willing the means to do this. The most universal and basic instinct in all doing and willing has for precisely this reason remained the least known and most hidden, because *in praxi* we always follow its commandments, because we *are* this commandment—. All valuations are only consequences and narrow perspectives in the service of this one will: valuation itself is only this will to power. A critique of being from the point of view of any one of these values is something absurd and erroneous. Even supposing that a process of decline begins in this way, this process still stands in the service of this will. To appraise being itself! But this appraisal itself is still this being!—and if we say no, we still do what we *are*. One must comprehend the absurdity of this posture of judging existence, and then try to understand what is really involved in it. It is symptomatic.” See also WP 706; CW “Epilogue”.

³⁸ For detailed discussions of contemporary versions of such views, see Miller (2003: 178-217).

The strategy followed here is thus different from the one Leiter ascribes to the proponents of the will-to-power interpretation, what he calls the “Millian Model” (2000: 282-86). For further discussion see (Hussain forthcoming-c). Leiter himself uses a similar strategy (105-112) when he interprets Nietzsche as having a reductive subjective realism for prudential goodness and

7. Non-Cognitivism

Finally, I turn to interpretations that ascribe a non-cognitivist metaethics to Nietzsche. As I noted in the initial cursory review of contemporary metaethical theories, it will be important to be clear about what we mean when we call a metaethical theory a non-cognitivist theory. The most notable recent defence of such an interpretation is by Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick, and I will follow their lead in taking the term ‘non-cognitivism’ to pick out the kind of theories that have come to be so identified in mainstream ‘analytic’ metaethics and that are defended by the likes of Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard.³⁹ Recall that, to put the matter in

similarly appeals to strategies employed by contemporary metaethicists who attempt to defend such views, in particular the work of Peter Railton (see, for example, (Railton 2003a) and (Railton 2003b)). Crucially on Leiter’s interpretation, there are only facts about what is good *for* different types of human. There is no account of what is good period, what is good for humans in general, or, as has been our focus in the body of the text, what is human flourishing in general as opposed to flourishing for a particular kind of person. Reginster, however, criticizes this line: “Nietzsche himself never relativizes the notion of flourishing, which is at the core of the prudential conception of the good, to one or another type of man. On the contrary, he always speaks of “*human flourishing*”—“the *highest power and splendor* actually possible to the *type man* (GMP:5-6; my emphases)” (Reginster 2003).

Bernard Reginster and Harold Langsam also appear to articulate and defend forms of subjective realism. See Reginster (2006) and Langsam (1997). For a critical assessment, see (Hussain forthcoming-a). See also (Richardson 1996).

³⁹ In what follows I draw extensively on my (forthcoming-b). A more wide-ranging

somewhat simplistic terms, the goal of such views is to avoid ending up with an account of normative and evaluative language according to which such language would express an attitude like belief that has an evaluative or normative proposition as its content. Such cognitivist views need to tell us a story about what normative or evaluative facts are responsible for the truth or falsity of normative language and the propositions and beliefs expressed. Non-cognitivism hopes to avoid all this. Thus the analogy with expressing commands: the issue of whether commands are true or false, and what kind of fact makes them so, does not arise, or so one might plausibly think. Non-cognitivist theories of this kind are thus crucially theories about the semantics of normative and evaluative language. The meaning of such language is to be given by the role of such language in expressing certain non-cognitive states, states that do not purport to represent the world as being a certain way and thus are not susceptible to either assessments of truth or falsity or questions about the nature of the states of affairs represented.

The notion of expression deployed in such theories is a distinctive one, or at least plays a distinctive role in non-cognitivist theories. It helps to draw a contrast with the way a cognitivist might use talk of expression—and, for our interpretive purposes, it helps in particular to draw the contrast with error theories. Take the error theorist who thinks that moral properties are, as Mackie put, metaphysically “queer”, too queer indeed to exist or be instantiated (Mackie 1977: 38-42). Now we might raise the following challenge to this error theorist: if these properties do

assessment of non-cognitivist interpretations of Nietzsche would need to consider metaethical theories that perhaps differ quite a bit from the basic expressivist approaches of Blackburn and Gibbard but that still might deserve the label ‘non-cognitivist’. The logical space here is quite extensive. For obvious reasons of space, I do not attempt to do that here.

not exist, then why do people go around calling things wrong? What is the point of this practice? Our error theorist might respond as follows: killing innocents causes lots of pain and suffering. It is hardly surprising, for all the obvious reasons evolutionary and otherwise, that humans have negative feelings towards killing innocents. These negative feelings partly explain why they call such killings wrong. Indeed, they *express* these negative feelings towards the killing of innocents by calling such killings wrong.⁴⁰

Now when this error theorist uses the word ‘express’ in this context she means it in a very straightforward, ordinary sense of the term. If you ask me whether Professor Smith is a good pedagogue and I reply by saying, ‘He’s never around to help his students’, then, under most normal circumstances, I will have *expressed* a negative attitude towards Professor Smith. However this expression of a negative attitude is in addition to the expression of a straightforward, non-evaluative, cognitive belief, namely, the belief that Smith is never around to help his students. The sentence is straightforwardly about a certain descriptive fact, the fact that Smith is never around to help his students. The semantics for judgements like this is *not* given by reference to the non-cognitive attitude of disapproval that it can also be used to express. Thus that a claim is sometimes used to express emotions does not give us reason to give a non-cognitive account of the semantics of that claim in the manner of contemporary metaethical non-cognitivism.

Indeed, even if a particular sentence always seems to be used to express, in the everyday sense, a non-cognitive attitude, we are not required to give a non-cognitivist account of its

⁴⁰ This is not to say that this strategy does not lead to further problems for the error theorist.

See (Hussain 2004b).

semantics. In contemporary society, a sentence of the form “John is short” may always be expressing—however slightly—a negative attitude towards the relevant person’s height. The negative attitude seems to be expressed even when there may be an explicitly positive claim about the height being made. Take the example of the leader of the pack of thieves who looks at John and says: ‘He’s short. He can get through the air duct’. Some *positive* non-cognitive attitude is also being expressed, but it is hard not to hear the negative one.

Of course this is why the traditional emphasis has been on necessity: evaluative or normative judgements are *necessarily* accompanied by a non-cognitive attitude. And *this*, so the non-cognitivist argues, can only be explained, or is best explained, if the very role of the judgment is to express the non-cognitive attitude. The judgment’s meaning is to be given by reference to its role in expressing this *non-cognitive* attitude. The upshot should be clear: believing in non-cognitivism requires thinking that the expression of a non-cognitive attitude is, in the relevant sense, necessary and requires thinking that the role of the judgment in question is to express the relevant non-cognitive attitude. Thus we can only ascribe non-cognitivism to a theorist if we think that he or she has these quite specific semantic commitments as part of his or her theory. Finally, it is these particular semantic commitments that might give the non-cognitivist distinctive tools to avoid error theory: since the state being expressed is not one that can be true or false we do not have to worry about some metaphysical threat to the truth of evaluative or normative claims.

I emphasize all this to help us figure out the kind of textual evidence needed to defend an ascription of a non-cognitive metaethical theory to Nietzsche. As we have already seen, there do indeed seem to be passages that sound very error-theoretic and it may not be immediately

obvious how they can support a non-cognitivist interpretation of Nietzsche.⁴¹ However, we have also seen the more positive passages, passages that, in way or the other, seem to emphasize our creative role in the generation of values which were used as evidence to ascribe revolutionary fictionalism and subjective realism to Nietzsche: for example, GS 301, with its insistence, recall, that we are the ones who have give value to a value-less nature.

A reading of this passage in the spirit of contemporary non-cognitivism would take it as making the basic non-cognitivist point—the point on which he or she agrees with the error-theorist—that the fundamental ontology of the universe is one of natural, descriptive properties. There are no normative or evaluative properties out there in nature that humans have learnt, somehow, to track just as they have learned to track size and shape and mass and so on: ‘nature is always value-less’ (GS 301). When we call something good, for example, we are not—I simplify away from some of the full complexity of contemporary non-cognitivism—ascribing some property to the thing, not even a relational property to my psychological states as the subjectivist would have it. Rather I am expressing some non-cognitive attitude of mine. Of course, once I am in the business of using normative or evaluative language—and thus in the business of expressing these attitudes—I can certainly say that such and such is good. However, again, all that is going on when I say that is that I am expressing some positive non-cognitive attitude towards the object. My judgement is not about some evaluative fact independently out there in the world. In this sense, then, the non-cognitivist would grant that we have ‘*given value*’ to nature and ‘created the world’ of valuations.⁴²

⁴¹ I return to this problem in the next section.

⁴² For reasons of space, I will wait till the next section to consider the other passages that

Why is this not subjectivism? The standard non-cognitivist line is two-fold: first, there is no reduction of normative or evaluative facts to subjective, psychological facts. The non-cognitivist is simply doing away with normative facts and so can hardly be accused of reducing them.⁴³ Second, for the non-cognitivist, the form of subjectivism that they really want to avoid is one in which the following kind of conditional is true:

(2) If *S* desires/approves of/likes *x*, then *x* is valuable/right/good.

Recall, that we had our non-cognitivist suggesting that *GS* 301 could be read as making the grand *metaethical* non-cognitivist point that nature is valueless. This is a descriptive claim and not a normative one and—again simplifying away from some of the complexities of contemporary non-cognitivism—this claim is then not one to which the distinctively non-cognitivist account of normative or evaluative language applies. It is not using, as opposed to mentioning, normative language and so it is a matter of stating straightforward truths. However, to avoid the charge of subjectivism, they will point out that (2) *does* use normative or evaluative language—see the ‘valuable/right/good’ in the consequent—and so it *is* a normative claim and so the non-cognitivist analysis does apply to it. Thus a sincere utterance of (2) is not the making of some descriptive claim. It is not reporting some truth let alone any truth entailed by the

Clark and Dudrick think support a non-cognitivist interpretation of Nietzsche.

⁴³ Again contemporary forms of non-cognitivism are more complex; they allow for talk of normative facts, but they give a non-cognitivist account of what one is saying when one says that it is a fact that murder is wrong. To put the point crudely: one is either just saying murder is wrong—the minimalist move—or one is saying murder is wrong with emphasis. In either case, one is doing no more than expressing non-cognitive attitudes.

collection of descriptive truths that constitute the non-cognitivist's metaethical theory. Rather it is the expression of some non-cognitive attitude. Which non-cognitive attitude? Well, the details vary with the form of non-cognitivism, but basically it is a relatively complex, higher-order, non-cognitive motivation to acquire the non-cognitive states expressed by claims of the form 'x is valuable' when one desires or approves of *x*.

Note that usually the non-cognitive state of desiring *x* and the non-cognitive state expressed by judgements of the form 'x is valuable' are different. The second non-cognitive state usually has a more complicated functional role. So, for example, it could include a tendency to avowal. It includes a tendency to extinguish a 'conflicting' state, say the state expressed by claims of the form 'x is not valuable'. And so on. See, for example, (Gibbard 1990) for extended discussions of the differences.

Returning to our conditional, (2), the non-cognitivist takes this to be a normative claim and so susceptible to the non-cognitivist account. As we have seen, what such accounts usually say about it is that it expresses a particular kind of higher-order attitude. Crucially it is not a descriptive claim straightforwardly true or false. Also, crucially, it does not follow just from the descriptive claims that comprise a non-cognitivist theory—including the descriptive claim that nature is, in the intended sense, valueless. Accepting it or not is a matter of normative debate, not a matter of metaethics. Most contemporary non-cognitivists—good, moral agents as they tend to be—will then proceed to take off their metaethical hats, put on their ordinary, moral agent hats, and happily reject (2).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Rejecting it is not required by non-cognitivism.

Thus, says our non-cognitivist, *GS* 301 expresses the general *descriptive* metaphysical world-view lying behind non-cognitivism but there is no reason to read it as making anything like the *normative* claim (2). The kind of subjectivism we want to avoid, she continues, is the one expressed by the normative claim (2). That there is some sense in which a non-cognitivist is committed to the fundamental ontology of the world being valueless is just part of the basic metaphysical commitments of the non-cognitivist, but not, they would insist, a form of subjectivism.⁴⁵

8. Comparative assessments

For reasons of space I have mostly been able merely to introduce several different metaethical interpretations of Nietzsche. Indeed, for the same reason, I have had to leave aside several interpretations of Nietzsche that could be interpreted as ascribing other metaethical views to Nietzsche but only with the kind of extensive development and critical discussion that would

⁴⁵ As Clark and Dudrick emphasize, a Nietzschean version of non-cognitivism, particularly one supposedly supported by *GS* 301, should probably not give all humans an equal role in getting us to have the perhaps distinctive non-cognitive attitudes expressed by different evaluative predicates. For further discussion, see (Hussain forthcoming-b). That paper also responds to Clark and Dudrick's attempts to shore up the anti-subjectivist credentials of non-cognitivism by adding further complexity to the kind of non-cognitivism ascribed to Nietzsche. I argue that the additions fail to ensure that the specific version of non-cognitivism they want to ascribe to Nietzsche provides his values with any more objectivity than they would have in standard forms of contemporary non-cognitivism.

simply not be possible here.⁴⁶ The interpretive task facing us is of course that of deciding which metaethical position, if any, fits *best* with Nietzsche's texts as opposed to, for example, finding

⁴⁶ I am thinking of the interpretations of Nietzsche in (Poellner 2007; Poellner 2009; Poellner Forthcoming; Richardson 2004; Katsafanas 2010). Much of Poellner's rhetoric suggests that he may be ascribing some view similar to that of Wiggins and McDowell. Of course that in itself makes it hard to figure out whether Poellner is ascribing a distinctive metaethical position to Nietzsche since it is notoriously unclear precisely what position either Wiggins or McDowell are themselves committed to. At other times he points to Dancy's work. All this might suggest some form of non-naturalist realism. When one focuses on the substantive content of Poellner's own remarks, it is quite unclear what he means by "*phenomenal objectivity*" and what ontological and semantic commitments are involved (Poellner 2007: 232). And thus it is quite unclear what, or rather whether, he intends to ascribe any particular metaethical view to Nietzsche. It is hard for me not to think that Poellner is confused about the space of logical possibilities for ways in which evaluative or normative truths could be dependent on subjective motivational states. Trying to figure out whether there is a metaethical view in his work, would take far too much effort.

Richardson, on the other hand, seems, at least initially, to be self-avowedly presenting a metaethical view of Nietzsche since a major part of his most recent book is entitled "Metaethics". However, again, I find it quite hard to figure out if there is in fact a metaethical view being presented here. Or, to put things perhaps more carefully, since the view he presents seems, as far as I can see, to be compatible with either realism or non-cognitivism, he must be using the term 'metaethics' in a sense different from that of contemporary, mainstream

Nietzschean proof texts that might *suggest* any particular metaethical position. The task we need to carry out then is inevitably a comparative one. Again, though, the kind of extensive comparisons of interpretive plausibility that would be needed for a final ranking of interpretations here would take far too much space. Instead, I will briefly mention some obvious comparative issues that are raised by the metaethical interpretations we have already seen.

Recall that I introduced revolutionary fictionalism, subjective realism, and non-cognitivism all as ways of dealing with the passages, particularly the ones we have repeatedly seen from GS, in which Nietzsche apparently claims that we *do* succeed in creating values. These were the

“analytic” discussions of these matters. Again, any serious attempt to get clear on the relationship between his view and mainstream metaethical theories would take far too much space.

The same, finally, holds for Katsafanas’s “constitutivist” position. Notoriously constitutivist positions like Korsgaard’s or Velleman’s seem, despite the widespread temptation to interpret them otherwise, neutral on metaethical issues; for all that seem to be the commitments of these views, they are compatible, again, with either realisms of various stripes or non-cognitivism. Katsafanas self-avowedly attempts to interpret Nietzsche in the light of constitutivist thinkers such as Korsgaard and Velleman, and, as far as I can see, then inherits the above mentioned feature of their theories, namely that the interpretation does not, in the end, seem to involve ascribing to Nietzsche any particular kind of metaethical theory. For relevant discussions of Korsgaard and Velleman, see (Hussain and Shah 2006a; Hussain and Shah 2006b; Hussain 2004a). Again, trying to pull out some metaethical interpretation from such constitutivist readings of Nietzsche would take far too much space.

passages that made *just* ascribing an error theory to Nietzsche implausible. The problem, obviously, is that we still need to account for the error-theoretic passages we began with. We have seen revolutionary fictionalism's way of handling the error-theoretic passages; however, how should the subjective realist or the non-cognitivist handle them? I have already discussed the possibility of claiming that Nietzsche intends the error-theoretic claims to apply only to some restrictive domain of normative or evaluative claims. Clark and Dudrick, in their defense of a non-cognitivist interpretation of Nietzsche, take up a version of the standard developmentalist strategy.⁴⁷ They grant that Nietzsche was an error theorist about all evaluative and normative judgements in HH but they claim that by the time of the first edition of GS, he gives up his error theory because he gives up his cognitivism (Clark and Dudrick 2007: 193).⁴⁸ They thus posit a radical shift in Nietzsche's metaethical views from error theory to non-cognitivism. This then, supposedly, would account for the error theoretic passages in Nietzsche while allowing that Nietzsche's developed metaethical view was a non-cognitivist one. One can imagine subjectivism using a similar strategy.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Oddly, in his apparent articulation in his book of an interpretation of Nietzsche as a subjective realist, Reginster does not take up this particular puzzle.

⁴⁸ In this section, I draw heavily on my (Hussain forthcoming-b).

⁴⁹ There are other possibilities that I will not consider here. Perhaps Nietzsche is a subjective realist about the good, reducing it to power, but thinks that achieving power requires false value judgements for some and perhaps honest illusions of value for others. Or perhaps Nietzsche could be interpreted as recommending revolutionary subjectivism or non-cognitivism (note that the kind of linguistic reform that such revolutions would require is rather different than the

Unfortunately, it is not at all clear that the texts do support such a radical shift. Furthermore, the specific passages which are supposed to have a non-cognitivist flavour to them, do not, it seems to me, have such a flavour. They are either, actually, far more friendly to an error-theoretic or fictionalist reading or merely point to the kind of harmless everyday expression of non-cognitive attitudes that I have already emphasized cannot use be used to support non-cognitivism.

We have already seen the evidence from HH for ascribing an error theory to Nietzsche (HH I:4; HH 32-33). I will return to the GS passages in a moment; however, we can see that the Clark-Dudrick thesis that there is a radical shift in Nietzsche's views is undermined by the presence of error-theoretic passages from TI written well after GS in 1888. Indeed, I began the section on error theory with one of the more dramatic such passages, the one in which Nietzsche declares that he was the "first to formulate" the "insight" that "*there are altogether no moral facts*".⁵⁰ This passage draws precisely the kind of parallel to religion that was drawn in, for example, HH I:4.⁵¹ And again, one might try to read some restriction here to a narrowly conceived domain of specifically *moral* judgements. As I emphasized though the context of the passage makes clear that a vast range of positions is included: Manu, Confucius, Plato, Judaism and Christianity. And it is an interesting question whether Nietzsche too is included among the "improvers of mankind". Thus at least for all these normative and evaluative judgments

creation of honest illusions of value).

⁵⁰ Emphasis in the original.

⁵¹ Similar passages occur, as we saw in that earlier section, from the Nachlass well after GS.

Nietzsche is still a cognitivist and an error theorist. Therefore the purported change to non-cognitivism must only have occurred for some subset of current evaluative terms.

However, first, no such restriction of domain by Nietzsche is actually defended on interpretive grounds by Clark and Dudrick. Second, there is evidence that no such restriction exists in Nietzsche's mind. Consider the following passages from the *Nachlaß* which show no such restriction (note the dates):

All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves ... all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things. (*WP* 12; November 1887-March 1888)

Or elsewhere: 'In the entire evolution of morality, truth never appears: all the conceptual elements employed are fictions' (*WP* 428; 1888).

Again, there is no sign in his notes of error theory being applied to most current evaluative and normative judgements, while the non-cognitivism is restricted to some subset.

Now, finally, let us take a look at the *GS* passages Clark and Dudrick appeal to in their argument that Nietzsche came to accept non-cognitivism. We have already seen *GS* 301. I take it that all hands agree that it is not at all obvious which metaethical view that passage supports. But let us take a closer look again at *GS* 299 which Clark and Dudrick do think attracts a non-cognitivist reading (202):

What one should learn from artists.—How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in themselves they never are. Here we should learn something from physicians, when for example they dilute what is

bitter or add wine and sugar to a mixture—but even more from artists who are really continually trying to bring off such inventions and feats. Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to see them at all; or seeing things around a corner and as cut out and framed; or to place them so that they partially conceal each other and grant us only glimpses of architectural perspective; or looking at them through tinted glass or in the light of the sunset; or giving them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent—all that we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters. (*GS* 299)

Now, I have to say that this passage does not seem to me to be an expression of non-cognitivism, in the contemporary metaethical sense, at all. That is not to say that it is obvious which metaethical view, if any, might lie behind it. But notice one essential, dominant feature of this passage, namely, the crucial role that various kinds of concealment or deception play: making sure there are things we do not see, making sure we give them some kind of non-transparent covering and so on. Why would any of this be central to a non-cognitive practice of valuing? After all the non-cognitivist's point is precisely that there is *no* mistake, deception, or confusion involved in valuing—non-cognitivists see themselves as saving us from having to posit errors or deception as essential to valuing.

Of course, I suspect there is a reason for the emphasis on deception and I think the best way to bring it out is to focus, in opposition to Clark and Dudrick, on the *continuity* between passages such as these and what Nietzsche says in *HH*. In his 1886 preface to *HH*, Nietzsche reiterates the point he had made in the body of *HH* about the 'necessary injustice' involved in evaluative

judgements. Nietzsche admits that his looking ‘into the world’ with his uniquely ‘profound degree of suspicion’—the suspicion that makes one think that everything including of course our evaluations are human, all too human—was psychologically difficult:

[I]n an effort to recover from myself, as it were to induce a temporary self-forgetting, I have sought shelter in this or that—in some piece of admiration or enmity or scientificity or frivolity or stupidity; and ... where I could not find what I *needed*, I had artificially to enforce, falsify and invent a suitable fiction for myself (- and what else have poets ever done? And to what end does art exist in the world at all?) (*HH* P:1)

Note the connection between poetry and art and the generation of fiction. It is this connection that Nietzsche seems again to be harping on in *GS* 299. That is why we are learning from artists. That is why, as in the passage just quoted from *HH*, we need to be poets. And now it should come as no surprise that the passage I quoted already from *HH* 33 continues as follows:

[M]ankind as a whole has *no* goal, and the individual man when he regards its total course ... must be reduced to despair. If in all he does he has before him the ultimate goallessness of man, his actions acquire in his own eyes the character of useless squandering. But to feel thus *squandered* ... is a feeling beyond all other feelings.—But who is capable of such a feeling? Certainly only a poet: and poets always know how to console themselves. (*HH* 33)

Poets can console themselves because they do what they have always done, as he says in the preface, namely, create fictions.

Clark and Dudrick take *GS* 299’s message to be that we create value by evoking non-cognitive reactions such as preferences and attitudes. Note first that in *GS* 299 there is hardly anything about non-cognitive preferences and attitudes. All the metaphors, except for the first

one about taste, are visual cognitive ones and Nietzsche clearly emphasizes that the latter metaphors, the ones involving artists, are the important ones. We could take the first one as emphasizing that generating a certain kind of non-cognitive reaction is an important part of making something valuable. But, as I emphasized earlier, not any old connection between non-cognitive motivations and value judgements gives you non-cognitivism. What we need evidence for is the very specific semantic thesis that the contemporary non-cognitivist is committed to. And what ever else may be going on here, it is hard to see evidence for that semantic thesis.

Clark and Dudrick bring in *GS 7* at this point as support. The opening of this passage reads as follows:

Something for the industrious.—Anyone who now wishes to make a study of moral matters opens up for himself an immense field for work. All kinds of individual passions have to be thought through and pursued through different ages, peoples, and great and small individuals; all their reason and all their evaluations and perspectives on things have to be brought into the light. So far, all that has given color to existence still lacks a history.
(*GS 7*)

Clark and Dudrick write that this passage ‘implies that the passions constitute “all that has given color to existence”’ (203). Talk of color is then taken, plausibly enough, as a metaphor for value. Would some such constitution claim support the non-cognitivist reading? Again, it will not cut much ice against, say, the subjectivist unless you can defend the ascription of the specific semantic claim that is at the heart of non-cognitivism. In any case, the passage does not give passions any such specific role. Evaluations, for example, and crucially, seem to also be part of what colours the world.

Furthermore, this passage actually plays against Clark and Dudrick. After emphasizing the vast amount of work that would be required for laying out the history and variation of ‘moral matters’, Nietzsche writes:

The same applies to the demonstration of the reasons for the differences between moral climates And it would be yet another job to determine the erroneousness of all these reasons and the whole nature of moral judgments to date. (*GS* 7)

The continuities with *HH* and thus the continuing suggestions of systematic error are quite compelling. Of course, the discussion in this section only scratches the surface of the careful comparative assessments that would need to be done to decide which metaethical theory we should ascribe to Nietzsche.⁵²

9. Underdetermination

On the other hand, one may well think that we have actually, perhaps inadvertently, accumulated compelling evidence for the conclusion that we do not have adequate textual grounds for ascribing *any* particular metaethical view or stance to Nietzsche. This is the view that Leiter takes when he claims that “there are inadequate textual resources for ascribing to [Nietzsche] a satisfying answer” to questions about the semantics of moral claims (Leiter 2000: 278). Thus “there are simply not adequate grounds for ‘assigning’ to Nietzsche a view on such subtle matters as whether ethical language is primarily cognitive or non-cognitive” (279).

One reason for thinking that Leiter’s position here is compelling is to remind ourselves of the kinds of arguments deployed in contemporary metaethics. Take, just as one example, appeals to

⁵² See (Hussain forthcoming-a) for one comparative assessment of subjective realist and fictionalist metaethical interpretations of Nietzsche.

judgement internalism as a basis for developing some form of non-cognitivism. Standard forms of such arguments require claiming not just that motivations tend to accompany, or perhaps even stand in some law-like relation to, the making of normative judgements. What judgement internalism requires is a form of conceptual necessity: it is not just that normative judgements always are accompanied by motivation but that it is inconceivable for them to occur without some relevant motivation. It is such strong modal commitments that usually, for better or for worse, drive contemporary metaethical debate. I would suggest that all extant metaethical theories—the kinds of theories which we have been trying to ascribe to Nietzsche—can account for contingent, even law-like, connections between normative judgements, or even normative truths, and our motivations. A naturalistically inclined philosopher like Nietzsche tends precisely to focus on the contingent, on the kind of data that empirical investigation, in some broad sense, can provide. But such data does not really cut ice in metaethical debates, and thus correlatively, Nietzsche's assertions along such lines can be co-opted by differing metaethical interpretations. The fact that so many different, conflicting metaethical interpretations of Nietzsche exist can plausibly be seen as a symptom of just this feature of Nietzsche's texts.

The texts thus lack the granularity that would really be needed to resolve the claims of competing metaethical interpretations. It seems, at least relatively, too easy to ascribe too many different such positions to Nietzsche. Officially I have discussed reductive (naturalistic) subjective realisms, non-cognitivism, error theory and fictionalism. However, I have not discussed, for reasons of space, views that seem like constitutivist and non-naturalist realist interpretations of Nietzsche. Almost every base seems to be covered. It is hard not to have the feeling that in the face of this lack of resistance by the texts, we are seeing regular deployments of what I would call the “principle of hypercharity”: if p , then Nietzsche believes that p . There

comes a point where one should simply argue for the philosophical positions themselves, rather than engage in proxy wars by using historical figures. Of course, I have not given grounds that would justify any such attack *ad hominem*. The point is rather to urge caution on us all.

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