

## **Giving Myself a Law: Nietzsche, self-respect, and the problem with Kant's universalism**

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### Abstract

This paper offers a new interpretation of Nietzsche's criticisms of Kant's account of freedom and renders these criticisms in such a way as to pose a serious challenge to Kantian ethics. My first aim is to explain Nietzsche's challenge to the principle that being free means acting as a free agent ought to act, which I call Kant's universalism. My second aim is to show that Kant's accounts of self-respect is a particularly unconvincing account of how we can make room for virtues within a universalistic framework, and thereby persuade the Kantian that there is something wrong with the underlying universalism principle.

## Section I

We find in both Nietzsche's and Kant's moral philosophy a characteristically modern response to the question of what it would be to live a good life: a good life is a free life. This is one of the ways in which Nietzsche's thought is of his time, contrary to his emphasis on the untimeliness of his work. Nietzsche is post-Kantian in the sense that his approach to ethical thought is focussed primarily on the subject of ethical thought, the thing that deliberates, wills, and undergoes self-examination and ethical transformation. He is also post-Kantian in the sense that he shares Kant's belief that the right kind of ethical thought will lead us to prioritise freedom, and that if we know how to be free then we also know the good.

But though this belief is characteristically modern, it will still seem strange to many. Ethical thought, we might think, is less about how my life can be good than it is about how I can do right by other people. Equally, scrutiny of myself, as the subject of ethical thought, may not strike me as the best way to begin ethical deliberation. I may, for instance, think that ethical thought ought to focus on the conditions of others, on whether those conditions are right or good, and on what I should expect of myself to improve those conditions.

Concern for others plays at most a minor role in Nietzsche's account of ethical thought,<sup>1</sup> and accordingly we should not expect a defence of freedom against altruism from him. Kant, however, is much more promising in this regard. For those of us who worry about a possible tension between being free and doing good, comfort can be found in Kant's argument for the claim that the only way to be truly free is to live by principles that take everyone, not just me, into account. The general intuition driving this argument – that my freedom and the good of others are not in tension but are mutually dependant – is one of the many elements of Kant's moral philosophy that Nietzsche will later vigorously contend.

The challenges that Nietzsche poses against this intuition come in many forms. In what follows I will treat only one of those. Specifically, my first aim is to explain Nietzsche's challenge to the principle that being free means acting as a free agent ought to act. For reasons that will become clear below, I will refer to this principle as Kant's universalism. Universalism is crucial to Kant's attempts to align freedom and altruism, because it is through an analysis of practical reason abstracted from particular agents that Kant attempts to demonstrate moral imperatives that are integral to freedom. Thus universalism is only part of Kant's argument for thinking that to be free is to be moral, but it is nonetheless an important part. We'll see in what follows that Nietzsche's main concern with the principle is that it makes the mistake of approaching the question of ethical living in third-personal terms. In other words, Nietzsche recognises and objects to Kant's version of what Bernard Williams called Socrates' question: « how ought *one* to live? » Nietzsche thinks this is a mistake for two related reasons: first, the only way to approach this question without risking a vicious self-denial would be: « how ought *I* to

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<sup>1</sup> This is not an uncontroversial claim, but I haven't space to argue for it here. For opposing readings of Nietzsche see e.g. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; and J. Church, *Infinite Autonomy. The divided individual in the political thought of GWF Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche*, Pennsylvania University Press, 2012.

live? »; and second, because the third-person principle fails to overcome a particular kind of heteronomy, or direction from an alien force, namely the direction of laws that are given to me by a false and fantastical image of myself.<sup>2</sup>

If my account of this is correct, then it is likely that this too will not come as news to many; the differences in ethical thought between Nietzsche and Kant are well-trodden ground. In an effort to go further than others who have already covered this territory, I will also make an attempt at a second aim: to show not just that Nietzsche had reasons to disregard Kant's third-personal principle, but also that he can persuade a Kantian to recognise the validity of those reasons. That is, my second aim is to show how Nietzsche might persuade the Kantian that there is something wrong with the third-person principle.<sup>3</sup>

My strategy for doing this will be to elaborate the difference between Nietzsche and Kant regarding Socrates' question in a particular direction: namely, with regard to how the two think of self-respect. Self-respect plays important roles in the moral philosophy of both Nietzsche and Kant, but their accounts of self-respect look very different to each other. This is because, I will argue, their fundamental disagreement on the third-person principle places certain restrictions on what they can consider as virtuous self-respect: for Kant, the right kind of self-respect must be for the free agent as such (the humanity within me); for Nietzsche, that respect must be for me and me alone. My reason for choosing this particular development of Nietzsche and Kant's fundamental disagreement is that it is, or so I aim to show, a particularly persuasive manifestation of the problems that Nietzsche associates with Kant. Kant's account of self-respect, I argue, is a particularly unconvincing account of how we can make room for virtues we associate with living a free and good life within Kant's framework. If we can convince the Kantian that there is something wrong with this understanding of self-respect, then we might persuade her that there is something wrong with the underlying third-person principle.

## Section II

I will begin by establishing some common ground on which Nietzsche and Kant will agree and which we may take as a starting point for a reasonable discussion between the two. Note, to begin, that circumscribing this shared terrain will require a somewhat « high altitude' view, and accordingly the shared features of Nietzsche and Kant's thought on freedom and ethics will seem somewhat general and vague for the moment. Suffice to say that once we get onto the relevant details of their accounts in section II, we will also

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<sup>2</sup> See B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Routledge, 2006, chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thus part of my aim here is to advance beyond the contrasts between Nietzsche and Kant drawn by, for example, David Owen and Aaron Ridley, and the available reconstructions of Nietzsche's criticism of Kant by, for instance, R. Kevin Hill. See D. Owen, *Autonomy, Self-Respect, and Self-Love. Nietzsche on Ethical Agency* in K. Gemes et al. *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; A. Ridley, *Nietzsche's Intentions: What the Sovereign Individual Promises* in K. Gemes et al. *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; R. K. Hill, *Nietzsche's Critiques. The Kantian Foundations of his Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

start to lose the sense in which they share a broadly similar approach and have a much clearer view of their most fundamental differences.

Both Nietzsche and Kant agree that there is a value to freedom – that it is worthwhile for human or rational agents to be free in some sense. Both also agree that this most valuable freedom is a kind of freedom that is not something granted to us just in virtue of being human or indeed in virtue of being practical agents (however we might cash that out). In other words, both think that the freedom worth having is a freedom that is not a given for all agents, and must be achieved.

For both, the freedom worth having can be roughly understood in terms of the well-worn distinction between positive and negative freedoms. Nietzsche and Kant agree that the free person must be negatively free, if by this we mean free from the direction and coercion of another, to a certain degree.<sup>4</sup> That is, both agree that the valuably free individual is at least free from heteronomy, or the direction of another, provided our concept of heteronomy is broad enough to encompass how it is understood by both Nietzsche and Kant. For Kant, the alien forces that direct heteronomous choice are the interests and desires contingent to the practical subject; thus the free practical agent must at the very least be free from determination by natural inclination and sense stimuli (see e.g. MS, 6:213-14).<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche too thought little of brute animality, but his worries about heteronomy more often concern what he considers a modern tendency to blindly conform to the ethical direction of our community, or what he often referred to as a « herd instinct ». This inclination to follow the herd is typical of what Nietzsche also refers to as the « fettered spirit » (e.g. MA 226), a character distinguished by an absence of critical reflection on the value of received opinion and ignorant of values and ways of thinking different to those of his own traditions and community. Nietzsche's fettered

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<sup>4</sup> I add this last proviso because for both Nietzsche and Kant the direction and even coercion of another can form part of a legitimate ethical education; both think that we can in some sense be taught to be free.

<sup>5</sup> My references to Kant's and Nietzsche's work will use the following abbreviations:

G: I. Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785, trans. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in M. J. Gregor, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge: CUP, 1996;

MS: I. Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1797, trans. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge: CUP, 1991;

SE: F. Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, 1874, trans. *Schopenhauer as Educator* in R.J. Hollingdale, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge: CUP, 1997;

WB: F. Nietzsche, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, 1876, trans. *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* in R.J. Hollingdale *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge: CUP, 1997.

MA: F. Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 1878, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, *Human, all Too Human*, Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

M: *Morgenröte*, 1881, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, *Daybreak*, Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

FW: *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882, trans. J. Nauckhoff, *The Gay Science*, Cambridge: CUP, 2001.

JGB: *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 1886, trans. J. Norman, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Cambridge: CUP, 2002.

GM: *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887, trans. C. Diethe, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Cambridge: CUP, 1997.

A: *Der Antichrist*, 1895, trans. *The Anti-Christ* in J. Norman, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilights of the Idols. And Other Writings*, Cambridge, CUP, 2005.

Numbered references to Kant's work refer to the volume and page numbers in Reiner *Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902. Numbered references to Nietzsche's work refer to the enumeration he gave to sections in his published work. Quotes in English use the translations listed above.

spirit is heteronomous in the sense that he is dominated by the customs of his environment, rather than being his own master.<sup>6</sup>

However, the two also recognise that being free from heteronomy is insufficient for the most valuable kind of freedom. Indeed, both are worried that a negatively free life could be just as bad for us as the heteronomous life. Such a life can be a bad life in at least three ways. First, negative freedom does not exclude the life of a wanton, free from the direction of others but also without direction at all, indulging thoughtlessly in any desire that he happens to have without a standard of what is worth desiring.<sup>7</sup> Second, liberation from the direction of custom and tradition could leave a negatively free individual in a confused state of paralysed indecision. Breaking from the fetters of one's traditions and customs can be liberating, but also traumatic; the dangers of the consequent solitude, for instance, is something of which Nietzsche was particularly aware.<sup>8</sup> To take a literary example of the existential weight of negative freedom – an example to which we will have cause to return later – we might think of the narrator and protagonist of Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*: Joseph's freedom from his former job, his political allegiances, his old friends and eventually his loved ones, leaves him with the perfect opportunity to reflect on himself and what he might do (his motivation to begin the diary that constitutes the novel); but this opportunity only increases his despair. Third, and as we also see in *Dangling Man*, Joseph's inability to find the strength to bear his negative freedom leads him to ultimately volunteer to join the Army, in pursuit of the order and regimen that might give his life some structure. In doing so, Joseph is driven by his negative freedom to seek out even stronger fetters than those of his former life. This third vice of negative freedom is, then, that it might in fact make heteronomy all the more tempting.

The right kind of freedom, then, must be a freedom we see in a life of a person who has a direction, but whose direction comes from herself. To be free, for both Kant and Nietzsche, is to be self-directing. It is important for both that the self that does this directing is distinguished from the part of ourselves that could mislead us in cases of heteronomy; for both, with differences only in emphasis, neither my animal-self nor my herd-self will direct me if I live a properly free life. It is also important for both that a directionless life is at best an impoverished life, and at worst no life at all.

Precisely how the two characterise what it is to have a direction is where we begin to see some of the familiar differences between Kant and Nietzsche emerge, though again here there is a shared approach that lies behind the very different language they adopt to explain the autonomously directed life. In a word, both Nietzsche and Kant describe human freedom in terms of self-legislation, if by that we mean acting in accordance with laws that we set for ourselves as our ends. In the self-legislating model of freedom, a life with autonomous direction is more specifically a life that is subject to particular normative standards that are followed by the free agent for no other reason

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<sup>6</sup> See also MA 228, 230, 632, M 9, FW 295, 296, A 54.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. a similar sentiment expressed in FW 295: « To me the most intolerable, the truly terrible, would of course be a life entirely without habits, a life that continually demanded improvisation ».

<sup>8</sup> As Nietzsche observes of both Goethe and Schopenhauer in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, isolation was one of their greatest dangers (SE 3).

than that those standards are her standards. Kant's version of this can be found in the *Groundwork*, where he maintains that, in the case of the moral individual,

« the will is not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it must be viewed as also giving the law to itself and just because of this as first subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author). » (G, 4:431)

Nietzsche's account of the virtue of self-direction is less heavy on the legalistic rhetoric, but nonetheless appeals to the notion of a law that gives direction to our lives. Take, for instance, Nietzsche's description of Wagner's 'dramatic element' while he was still enamoured with « the Master »:

« there was an end to fumbling, straying, to the proliferation of secondary shoots, and with the most convoluted courses and often daring trajectories assumed by his artistic plans there rules a single inner law, a will, by which they can be explained » (WB 2)

The capacity to direct oneself, in accordance with a « single inner law », is a virtue that Nietzsche will echo in later work, even after the breakdown of his friendship with Wagner (see, for instance, his appeal to « a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small » in FW 290). And Nietzsche will also, at times, continue to describe this capacity as an ability to give oneself a law:

« We, however, want to *become who we are* – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves! » (FW 335)

Though I haven't the space here to do justice to Nietzsche's theme of becoming who we are (though we will return to this later), it is worth noting that Nietzsche intimates that the way a free spirit gives herself laws bears striking resemblance to the way in which Kant's moral individual rationally appropriates the moral law. Giving ourselves a law means, for Nietzsche, reconciling two antistrophic ethical demands: on the one hand the demand to self-improvement, to depart from our character, our habits and inclinations given to us by our first and second natures; and on the other hand a demand of honesty to confront ourselves as we are (« So long live physics! And even more long live what *compels* us to it – our honesty! » FW 335). This latter demand requires of the free individual not only that she gives laws to herself but also that those laws are informed by a process of self-examination (SE 1), in order to prevent us from trying to become something we are not. In a broadly similar way, though without the same emphasis on honesty, Kant's argument for the normative authority of the moral law is also grounded in a process of self-examination, or more precisely an examination of our nature as bearers of practical rationality (this self-examination will be discussed in greater detail below). Thus the freedom of both Nietzsche and Kant's ethical ideals is a self-legislated freedom insofar as it involves orienting oneself in the right way to laws given to me through proper self-examination.

### Section III

The considerations of the previous section should show that the two agree that, in order to live a good life, I need an answer to the question: which laws should I live by? But as we know, their answers to this question are very different, and not only different, but strongly opposed to one another. Let me begin with how they differ before bringing into relief precisely how Nietzsche's treatment of self-legislation is opposed to that of Kant.

Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork* is « act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law » (G, 4:421). Accordingly, if Kant's moral person is to follow the categorical imperative she must live by universal laws. It is important that « universal law » here means not only a law that is applicable to all agents but also a law that is applicable to an agent as such. That is, the laws by which we should live are laws that are not dependent on anything contingent to any particular agent, and thus are not grounded in character features (desires, interests, habits) that are accidental to agency.

This is different, and significantly so for the rest of this discussion, from just a law that can consistently be applied all agents. Kant has a tendency to write about examples of moral deliberation in a way that may lead us to think that the categorical imperative is only to be used in a particular kind of self-criticism, a « what if everyone did that? » thought experiment (e.g. I cannot will that everyone keeps promises only when they feel like it because those who lived by such a principle could not trust the promise of another, and thus the whole practice of promising would fall apart (G 4:402-403)). But this is just one part of the story. In providing such examples, Kant shows us how we can judge whether any particular maxim accords with the categorical imperative. Thus when our moral thought is concerned with appraising the moral credentials of our actions (when we undertake what we might now term « normative ethics »), Kant thinks we can consider what would happen if everyone around me acted as I do.

But he does not think that what others could do, or ought to do, is relevant to what grounds the obligation of morality in the first place. When our moral thought is concerned not with moral appraisal of particular acts, but with why we should be moral at all (when we undertake what we might now term « metaethics »), we should instead consider what laws an agent as such, stripped of any contingent features, is bound to. This difference between who we ought to consider when we appraise the morality of our maxims, and who we ought to consider when judging whether we ought to be moral at all, can be put in grammatical terms. I can assess the morality of my maxim by considering whether it can be applicable to the definite third person: « ought *we* do that? » Conversely, Kant grounds moral obligation by considering what is applicable to the indefinite third person: « what ought *one* to do? » where « one » refers to an indefinite practically rational agent. This means, then, that Kant's answer to the question « which laws should I live by? » is not « the laws we should all live by » but rather: those laws that are binding on you insofar as you are a bearer of practical rationality.

How would Nietzsche answer this question? Recall that for Nietzsche « whether the taste [that governs me is] good or bad means less than one may think » (FW 290). Thus Nietzsche's answer to the question « which laws should I live by? » cannot be « good laws », or in this case, « good taste ». He may think that the best lives are those that are governed by good taste but, crucially, he does not think that this means that this will

also be the law that could or should govern the lives of each of us; a taste should not govern me *because* it is good taste, still less because it is a moral taste.

Instead, Nietzsche maintains that the laws I should live by are determined by who I am. We see this principle expressed in one of the most dominant and recurring themes in Nietzsche's ethical thought, that of « becoming who we are ». In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, for example, he describes this as a task demanded of us by an existential conscience, which insists: « Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring is not you yourself » (SE 1). Resisting the heteronomous life of the herd requires that we acknowledge the fact that we « will be in the world only once and that no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together into a unity so strangely variegated an assortment » (SE 1). How do heed that call of conscience?

« Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it? Set up these revered objects before you and perhaps their nature and their sequence will give you a law, the fundamental law of your own true self » (SE 1)

As noted in section II, Nietzsche shares with Kant the view that the free life is a product of self-examination, by which we come to understand the laws that should govern us. But in contrast to Kant, in Nietzsche's account these laws are laws that are applicable to me and to me only (see e.g. FW 335). This is important to Nietzsche for a number of reasons. If my ethical deliberation seeks that which is distinctive about me, it is less likely to tolerate a complacent regurgitation of the customs of my community and tradition; Nietzsche's fettered individual is much more likely to continue as such if he continues to see himself as just another member of the herd. Similarly, focusing my ethical deliberation on that which is distinctive about me may encourage me to recognise things about me which are not conducive to living how customs would dictate. Illness, for instance, may force me to find an unconventional way of achieving greatness.<sup>9</sup> But these reasons to study myself in ethical deliberation do not preclude the possibility that I share ethical laws with others, and Nietzsche is clear that my good life must be a life that only I can live. One reason he appears to have for thinking this is that it is simply the case that any one life is singular, and that living that life well would still be a matter of living a life that only I can live:

« In his heart every man knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together into a unity so strangely variegated an assortment as he is: he know it but he hides it like a bad conscience » (SE 1)

But Nietzsche's most important reason for focussing on what is unique to me is that this is the only way he thinks we will meet his demand to honestly and truthfully live with ourselves. *Schopenhauer as Educator* was of course written at a time when Nietzsche was

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<sup>9</sup> As Nietzsche suggests in MA 231, « a mutilation, crippling, a serious deficiency in an organ offers the occasion for an uncommonly successful development of another organ ».



still enamoured with the metaphysical redemption offered by Schopenhauer's philosophy. But later Nietzsche would come to resist the temptation to seek redemption from the uglier and more painful elements of honest self-appraisal. Part of the difficulty of learning to love his fate was that Nietzsche would have to resist the urge to « wage war against ugliness » (an ugliness that included crippling headaches and blindness that plagued him for the vast majority of his adult life; see FW 276). Similarly, one of the greatest difficulties posed by the challenge of the demon of FW 341 is to live with the thought that I will have to live innumerable times more « every *pain* and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life » (emphasis mine). To become who we are we must resist the temptation to be selective about who we are, and for Nietzsche this includes avoiding the temptation to trim down the idiosyncrasies that distinguish us from other people.

Thus while Nietzsche's thought after the mid-1870s abandoned the hopes for metaphysical redemption, Nietzsche would not abandon his commitment to the value of self-scrutiny. Nietzsche's thought about the eternal return of the same became so important to him, in part, because of the way that it crystallised how difficult he thought it would be to face up to who we are, and what kind of life has been given to us, with a painful and unremitting honesty. But it was also important to him because he considered the most difficult existential task to be the most valuable task: that is, interrogation of myself to discover my « fundamental law », to accept it bare and unvarnished, and to live in accordance with it.

These considerations reveal the somewhat counter-intuitive way in which Nietzsche understands what it is to « give ourselves laws ». Self-legislation, for Nietzsche, is not a process by which I think up *ex nihilo* the law of a good life and then somehow impose that on myself. Instead, Nietzsche's self-legislator gives herself a law in the way that laws of the physical world are given to us by examination of that world. This is the sense in which Nietzsche thinks of ethical thought as comparable to the work of a physicist (FW 335): the discovery of laws that are given to me by who I am and most importantly by what is unique to me. The task of honest self-examination thus supports a free life by allowing us to understand, recognise, and adopt what Nietzsche considers the right attitude towards the ethical laws that I give to myself.<sup>10</sup>

Consider this, again in grammatical terms, in contrast to Kant's account. By Kant's account, the indefinite third person pronoun is the proper grammatical category for what Bernard Williams has called Socrates' question: the guiding question for living a moral life is « how ought one to live? » For Nietzsche, what others do and what the practical agent as such ought to do should not concern me when I attempt to determine

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<sup>10</sup> It is this feature of Nietzsche's account of freedom that gives us the best chance of reconciling his advocacy for autonomy (see for instance GM II 2) with his repeated denial of free will (see e.g. M 124, JGB 21). For if Nietzsche believes that the law I follow when self-legislating is « fated » in the same way that natural laws are given to us, then his position could be compatibilist in precisely the way needed for his determinism or fatalism to be consistent with his theory of freedom. Cashing this out would, however, require a whole other paper. (I am grateful to an anonymous review for pushing me on this).

the laws by which I should live my life. For Nietzsche, the relevant pronoun is the first person: how ought *I* to live?<sup>11</sup>

This grammatical difference is indicative of a difference between Kant and Nietzsche that is not merely grammatical. Their differing approaches to thinking about Socrates' question – « how ought one to live? » and « how ought I to live? » – lead them to think very differently about what would count as a legitimate answer to that question. More specifically, the grammatical difference between Kant and Nietzsche leads them to endorse and reject different forms of ethical deliberation. For Kant, ethical deliberation must be guided by consideration of what the rational agent as such ought to do, and not guided by consideration of what is particular to me and accidental to practical rationality. Accordingly, Kant maintains that legitimate reasons for doing something include moral reasons – the action in question is what the rational agent as such ought to do – and exclude personal reasons – the action in question is what I ought to do, regardless of whether others ought to do it. Conversely, Nietzsche maintains that ethical deliberation must be guided by consideration of what I ought to do, which includes a consideration of biographical features that apply to no-one but me, and a survey of my past desires, the things to which I have shown myself to be truly committed, and the moments in which I have revealed the more noble and worthwhile version of myself. He also thinks that our ethical deliberation should not be guided by consideration of reasons that are universal in the sense discussed above. Accordingly, Nietzsche believes that the reasons to live one way and not another must include personal reasons and exclude what Kant would consider moral reasons. The two disagree, then, on two counts: with regards to whether, first, moral reasons, and second, personal reasons, should be considered as part of ethical deliberation.

## Section IV

My aim is not, however, to only identify disagreement between Nietzsche and Kant. It is rather to do this and to show that it is worth the time of a Kantian to pay attention to this disagreement, and to reconsider her position in light of Nietzsche's concerns. To this end, I'll concentrate on just one of the two specific points of departure between Nietzsche and Kant: the disagreement on whether Kant's universalism is acceptable, that is, whether moral or universally applicable reasons should be taken into consideration as part of ethical deliberation. In this section I will outline three objections against Kant's universalism that we can draw from Nietzsche. One of these, I suggest, is not a very good objection. The other two, however, are objections that can be recognised by a Kantian, albeit once we have rendered these objections more convincing.

Nietzsche's first, less successful objection to Kant's approach is that it is dogmatic, in the sense that it smuggles in unquestioned traditional assumptions about the right life (JGB 5, 186, 202). Nietzsche's ground for this is that Kant's moral philosophy is an attempt to unpack our moral intuitions, rather than question those intuitions. As Kant

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<sup>11</sup> See also, for example, MA I 95. Also note however that, as Raymond Geuss has observed, Nietzsche's ethical thought in fact goes beyond this question, asking « what ought I to do? » as well as « what value does doing what I "ought" to do have? » (R.Geuss, *The Future of Evil*, p.17).

himself put it, the categorical imperative is a principle which reason « actually has always before its eyes », such that the task of the Groundwork is to articulate something of which we already have an intuitive grasp and acceptance (G 4:403). Nietzsche's concern with this is that it can only lead to the moral philosopher repeating the assumptions of the community that has taught him these intuitions about the good life. If Nietzsche were right about this, we could say that Kant's universalism feigns reflexive critique and lures us into regurgitating reasons that appear to be universal but are in fact only particular to Kant's own perspective. Moreover, again if Nietzsche were right about this, we could say that Kant's moral individual bears significant resemblance to Nietzsche's « fettered individual », specifically because both would be beholden to the dogma of one's community, and in Kant's case beholden to that dogma while under the illusion of living in accordance with universal laws (see also JGB Preface).

The problem with this objection is that while Kant did indeed think he was unravelling something with which we are already familiar, that something was not an intuition about the content of the good life. That which reason already has before its eyes is not a particular prescription for living one way rather than another, but is the form of practical reason itself. Kant's aspiration is not to elucidate our intuitions about what is good but to elucidate what it is to make a judgement about the good at all.<sup>12</sup> We may well be able to show that Kant's moral prejudices are smuggled into his philosophy by other means, but Nietzsche's suggestion that Kant does this simply in virtue of the fact that he takes moral intuitions as his starting point is a particularly unconvincing version of this objection. At the very least, the Kantian is not going to be convinced of this without a lot more from Nietzsche by way of demonstration of this claim.

Nietzsche's second objection is more successful. At times Nietzsche will accuse Kant's moral philosophy of being characteristically subservient. There is, according to Nietzsche, an inclination to obey and to serve expressed in Kant's approach to ethical thought (JGB 187; cf. JGB 199, FW 335). Why does Nietzsche think this? One reason Nietzsche could have for accusing Kant of subservience is that the language Kant employs to talk about the good life places heavy emphasis on following the law and doing one's duty. This makes it difficult to read Kant without getting the impression that being moral is primarily about obeying, albeit in the right way. It is not implausible, I think, that Nietzsche would have seen something distastefully submissive in Kant's emphasis on moral obeisance.

However it is unlikely that the Kantian would be at all responsive to this particular version of Nietzsche's subservience objection. First, we're unlikely to gain any favour with a Kantian by telling her that Kant was naturally inclined to submissiveness, and that we can simply tell this from the language he employs. At the very least, we would have to do much more than simply state that Kant was subservient by character (and certainly more than state it in Nietzsche's rather brutal fashion) in order to convince the Kantian of this. And second, even if she concedes that Kant's moral philosophy betrays his natural submissiveness (and this is already conceding a lot), the Kantian could

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<sup>12</sup> For more on this see S. Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, Harvard University Press, 2009, Chapter 1

object that Nietzsche's critique is vulnerable to a charge of ad hominem fallacy, on the grounds that Nietzsche is erroneously inferring from Kant's character that there is something wrong with the moral law that he elucidates.

Thus Nietzsche's charge of subservience is not going to help us address the Kantian if that charge is made on the grounds that Kant's rhetoric betrays his subservience. But there is a way we can expand on Nietzsche's objection that makes it, I think, more worrying for Kant. Nietzsche's claim in the relevant passages is not just that Kant himself was naturally subservient, but that there is a submissive character to his moral philosophy, and with that the claims Kant makes about what kind of law the free and good individual would live by. Why might Nietzsche think this? One way we can make good on this claim is to suggest that the third-person approach to ethical deliberation encourages us to follow an ethical model that is not an authentic reflection of who I am. The third-person approach is in this sense akin to a vice that Edward Harcourt has called « bovarysme »: « the phenomenon of a person's life being dominated, in a certain way, by a model of how to live that is derived from narrative art ».<sup>13</sup> In the case of bovarysme the vice lies in allowing oneself to be captured by a fiction of the good life, and in doing so becoming enamoured with a false ideal that dominates one's decisions and misleads us into thinking we can become something we are not. In the case of Kant's moral philosophy, we might worry that an approach to ethical thought that begins with the question « what ought the practical agent to do? » also allows us to be captured by a fiction, though in this case not a literary fiction of a good or noble character but a philosophical fiction of the pure practical agent. This same worry is expressed by the narrator and protagonist of Saul Bellow's *The Dangling Man*, who reflects on his younger self as follows:

« ...here I feel it necessary to revive Joseph, that creature of plans. He had asked himself a question I still would like answered, namely, "How should a good man live; what ought he to do?" Hence the plans. Unfortunately, most of them were foolish. Also, they led him to be untrue to himself. He made mistakes of the sort people make who see things as they wish to see them or, for the sake of their plan, *must* see them. »

The commitment of Joseph's younger self to being a good man dominates his choices and steers his plans, encouraging him to be something he is not – in this case, a purified, pious and thereby reduced and falsified version of himself. Joseph's focus on what a good man as such ought to do leads him to become dominated by an inauthentic ideal, which prevents him from being able to see himself and his situation for what it is. Note that the sense in which those who suffer from this vice are « dominated' by a fiction is the converse of what Nietzsche means by « giving oneself a law ». Whereas Nietzsche's free individual self-legislates in the sense that the law by which she lives is given to her by who she is (she becomes who she is), the ethical laws that govern the young Joseph are given to him by what he imagines it would be to be the good man as such, a picture of morality from which he receives his ideas of what he should become. According to

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<sup>13</sup> E. Harcourt, *Nietzsche and the aesthetics of character* in S. May et al., *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality. A Critical Guide*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.266

Nietzsche's high standards, the young Joseph falls short of autonomy because his laws do not come from himself – he does not give himself laws – and are instead given to him by a false idol.

My suggestion here is that Nietzsche's charge of subservience against Kant is alluding to the same vice. By counselling us to think about how a good man – or more accurately, a good practical agent – should live, Kant's third-person approach to ethical thought will at best prove unhelpful in resisting the temptation to follow a false picture of a moral life, and at worst actively encourage us to eschew the ethical laws suggested to us by honest self-examination and instead follow laws that are given to us by something external to us. As Nietzsche might put it, if I follow Kant's path I put myself in pawn and lose myself.<sup>14</sup>

Both bovarysme and the related vice that Nietzsche sees in Kant's universalism are also likely to involve a high degree of self-denial. That is, the vice that Nietzsche sees in being dominated by a moral fiction involves two forms of denying oneself: both lying to oneself about what we can really be, and fighting against and fleeing from desires and needs that are integral to who we are. Herein we find Nietzsche's third objection to Kant's universalist approach: that being dominated by an inauthentic ideal of oneself will encourage us to deny who we really are.

We are already familiar with this objection in Nietzsche's critical appraisal of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, and in a variety of sceptical epistemological concerns Nietzsche has about our aspirations to objectivity. Nietzsche's concern with Schopenhauer's aesthetics in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morality* was that the latter betrayed a self-disgust in the way that he endorsed asceticism in judgements of beauty. Disinterestedness in aesthetic judgement, Nietzsche claimed, helped Schopenhauer liberate himself from the frustrations of sexual desire; Schopenhauer's asceticism, in other words, helped Schopenhauer « *free himself from torture* » (GM III 6). The epistemological equivalent of aesthetic disinterestedness is, according to Nietzsche, our aspiration to a truth without perspective or, Nietzsche might say, looking upon the world after having cut off one's own head (MA 9). Again, Nietzsche's complaint about this element of the will to truth – the ambition to deny what is distinctive about our perspective when trying to discover the truth – is that it betrays self-contempt and a desire to be rid of ourselves (GM III 25; cf. FW 344). This drive to deny ourselves in our efforts to be objective is a vice that Christine Swanton has helpfully labelled « hyperobjectivity ».<sup>15</sup>

Nietzsche's third complaint about Kant's universalism is that it betrays the same hyperobjectivity that can be found in aesthetics and science, but this time in the context of moral philosophy. Kant's moral hyperobjectivity counsels the denial of anything particular about the individual considering ethical questions. My deliberation about the

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<sup>14</sup> See SE 1: « No one can construct for you the bridge upon which precisely which precisely you must cross the stream of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would bear you through this stream; but only at the cost of yourself: you would put yourself in pawn and lose yourself ».

<sup>15</sup> C. Swanton, *Nietzsche and the virtues of mature egoism* in S. May et al., *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality. A Critical Guide*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.299-300.

right thing to do, or the right way to live, should make no room for anything that is not a feature of the practical agent as such. This gives Nietzsche a second reason to worry about those of us who, like Saul Bellow's dangling man, are dominated by the question « How should a good man live? » Not only does Nietzsche think the pursuit of « the good man » a search for a false ideal, he also thinks this search will exacerbate the kind of self-contempt that we see in other manifestations of the ascetic ideal. Kant's universalism, Nietzsche thinks, is a vehicle for self-denial.

## Section V

Nietzsche has, then, three rather strong objections to Kant, strong in the sense that if any of the three were to hold they would undermine a central principle of Kant's moral philosophy. The question on which I want to focus, however, is whether any of those objections could be recognised by a Kantian as a good reason to abandon universalism. As they stand, I think they could not. The first objection, as I argued above, can be easily dismissed by a Kantian. The second and third objections are particularly uncharitable (they amount to the rather aggressive charge that Kant's moral thought encourages self-contempt and the worship of a false idol), and are unlikely to be taken all that seriously by someone who is not already willing to reject Kant. The third objection requires that the Kantian give up her commitment to thinking that personal circumstances and character traits are irrelevant to proper moral deliberation; if she doesn't give up that commitment, why would she think there is something wrong with the denial of self involved in moral « hyperobjectivity »? Similarly, the second objection requires that the Kantian accept the improbable possibility that despite his best efforts, Kant's moral philosophy lapses back into a form of autonomy he was at great pains to avoid. Something more than a bald accusation of servility and self-contempt is needed from Nietzsche in order to show the Kantian that Kant's universalism bears these vices.

This is, I think, indicative of a general problem Nietzsche faces in his critique of modern moral thought. The difficulty Nietzsche faces is that any particular principle held by a proponent of modern morality is likely to be supported by a range of related commitments, all of which together constitute a constellation of beliefs and values that Nietzsche refers to as « morality ». In the case of Kant's universalism, for example, that principle is in turn supported by the belief that personal matters are not worthy candidates for moral guidance. One could of course deal with this difficulty by simply chipping away at these beliefs, principles, and values one by one until none are left. But it is clear that the complexity of the moral world-view is such that this is at best an imprudent approach to effectively criticising an interlocutor's world view as a whole.

Nietzsche also often thinks of modern moral thought in terms of illness, and his response to that illness as that of a physician. This introduces an added difficulty to what Nietzsche thinks he must do if he is to be heard by a moralist. Nietzsche often treats his moral interlocutor's sickness as if the moralist were an addict (addicted, as it were, to morality) and as such will not be responsive to the facts of his addiction or reasons why it would be better not to be moral. In the case of Nietzsche's critique of Kant, it is a critique that has to deal with an alleged addiction to subservience and to self-denial. If Nietzsche is right about that, then the Kantian cannot be expected to agree with

Nietzsche when he points out that Kant's moral philosophy encourages servility and self-contempt; expecting this would be like expecting an alcoholic to respond well to the accusation that he is addicted to drinking. Nietzsche's way of thinking about his moral opponent thus means that he must find alternative ways of showing the moralist that there is something wrong not just with particular beliefs he holds, but with the way he thinks and behaves as a whole. Moreover, this way of showing the moralist something about him must be a way of showing that is capable of having an effect on someone who is not currently capable of seeing things for what they are.

One way to show the Kantian that Kant's universalism really does encourage vice would be to show that a moral philosophy committed to universalism cannot accommodate a virtue that is the converse of servility and asceticism. That virtue is known to both Kant and Nietzsche as self-respect; thus this way of engaging the Kantian would be to show that Kant's moral philosophy is incapable of accommodating self-respect. This strategy is even more likely to work if we can show that when Kant's universalism tries to make sense of such a virtue, it in fact ends up lapsing into a servile and self-denying version of self-respect. We might see this, then, as a form of *reductio* argument whereby we show that a particular virtue cannot follow in anything but a perverted form from the commitment to ethical universalism. This is not an argument we find in Nietzsche's work, but it is an argument we can put forward ourselves based on a contrast between Nietzsche and Kant's accounts of self-respect.

Perhaps Kant's clearest statement on the virtuous form of self-respect comes in his account of the converse vice of servility in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Here Kant maintains that our dignity – the intrinsic worth of every person granted simply by virtue of the fact that we are « the subject of a morally practical reason » (MS 6:435) – gives us a right to exact respect from other people; other people would be doing some wrong were they not to esteem our worth in accordance with our dignity. This is, Kant insists, a worth that is accorded to all of us equally, presumably because being the subject of practical reason is not something that admits of greater and lesser degrees. Kant also thinks this is an estimation of worth that is not just owed us from others, but owed us from ourselves. Indeed, he maintains that « *self-esteem* is a duty of man to himself » (MS 6:435), and that dignity, the object of this esteem, is something that he cannot forfeit. Self-respect is thus, for Kant, a relation in which « the (natural) man feel[s] himself compelled to revere the (moral) man within his own person » (MS 6:436).

Kant's account of self-respect thus follows the third-person approach taken in his universalism; just as his moral philosophy generally requires that we consider what the practical agent as such ought to do, so too does the virtue of self-respect require that we esteem that practical agent as such. By contrast, Nietzsche maintains that self-respect must involve a high estimation of the worth of that which is unique to me. The most sustained account of the virtue in Nietzsche's work is to be found in the final book of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche's analysis of « What is Noble » identifies characteristics of aristocracy, including their high self-estimation, that could be considered virtuous.

The health of an aristocracy, we are told, depends on its capacity to distinguish itself and treat other social stations with contempt, in order not to stifle the cruel instincts that come with vitality (JGB 259). One of the distinctive features of a noble or «

master » morality is that those who do well by its standards consider themselves honoured for their capacity to create values. The psychological benefits to the high self-regard afforded the noble by this morality are clear to Nietzsche:

« The noble type of person feels that he determines value, he does not need anyone's approval, he judges that "what is harmful to me is harmful in itself", he knows that he is the one who gives honour to things in the first place, he creates values. He honours everything he sees in himself: this sort of morality is self-glorifying. In the foreground, there is the feeling of fullness, of power that wants to overflow, the happiness associated with a high state of tension, the consciousness of a wealth that wants to make gifts and give away » (JGB 260)

What is most important for Nietzsche about the nobleman's high self-regard is his capacity to have a high regard for that which distinguishes him from others. Nietzsche sees great worth in a noble « pathos of distance » – the noble's awareness of his high social rank that distinguishes him from others – because that pathos plays a role in encouraging self-overcoming, a drive to develop that within us which is both higher and more rare (JGB 257). His thought here, as I understand it, is that « every enhancement so far in the type "man" has been the work of an aristocratic society » (JGB 257) because such a society allows for some people to think that the ethics by which they should live are different and greater than the ethical rules applicable to others. This allows aristocrats the opportunity to develop the idea that not only are they expected to be greater than those of other social rank, but they are also expected to become greater than themselves. In other words, a noble's respect for that which is distinctive of his rank develops into a respect for that which is distinctive of him, and accordingly – or so Nietzsche hopes – he can recognise that becoming who he is requires that he becomes « incomparable » (FW 335).

It is important to distinguish what Nietzsche sees as the virtuous self-respect of the nobleman and that of the noble soul. When Nietzsche tells us that « the noble soul has reverence for itself » (JGB 287), he does so in order to bring into relief a feature of the noble soul that is not necessarily to be found in all members of an aristocracy. The pathos of distance is afforded an aristocrat because he is recognised as a member of a certain class. The honour afforded the noble in such circumstances may increase his self-reliance, but may just as easily encourage him to rely on the judgement of his peers and of the reverence of his subordinates. And there is, as Nietzsche suggests, something subservient about someone whose good opinion of themselves depends heavily on the good opinion of others (JGB 261). The self-respect of an aristocrat is a virtue, in Nietzsche's view, but is not the greatest form of self-respect because it is dependent on a social order that recognises the honour of the aristocrat. The self-reverence of the noble soul is more impressive to Nietzsche because it does not rely on the opinion of others. It thereby shows a strength of character lacking in those who respect themselves merely in virtue of occupying a certain social status.

The self-respect of the noble soul also differs from the self-respect of the aristocrat insofar as the latter consists of respect only for a social station, whereas the former is respect for that which is unique about the bearer of self-respect. The same



point about the highest form of self-respect is made in Nietzsche's analysis of a related phenomenon, self-love, in which Nietzsche tells us that learning to love ourselves is like learning to appreciate a musical piece:

« first one must learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate and delimit it as a life in itself; then one needs effort and good will to stand it despite its strangeness; patience with its appearance and expression, and kindheartedness about its oddity. » (FW 334)

Learning to love ourselves requires that we distinguish our lives from others and identify what is unique to us, just as we would a melody, for two reasons. First, it allows us to take up part of the task of becoming who we are: cultivating the right attitude towards all facets of our character, including that which is strange or odd. If we learn to love ourselves only for what we share with others, then we learn to love only part of ourselves, and thus fail to confront distinctive, and perhaps even ugly sides of our character that are just a part of who we are as that which we share with, for instance, those of our social class.

Second, Nietzsche suggests here that learning to love myself for what I share with others is not really learning to love myself at all. If I grow fond of Bach's B minor Mass only because it is a particularly beautiful Christian work, then I am not really growing fond of that piece in particular. The same point could be made if I grow to love a person not for who that person is, but for something I see in that person that I already loved. This is seen most clearly in cases such as that of James Stewart's Scottie Ferguson in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: when Scottie falls in love with Judy, it becomes clear that he has in fact fallen in love with the ghost of his former lover Madeleine, no more so than when he asks Judy to change her clothes and hair to resemble Madeleine. For all the complexities of Scottie's love, one thing we can say for certain is that he has not learned to love Judy because his obsession does not allow him to see what is distinctive about Judy. In the process Scottie's misdirected love leads him to indulge a fantasy of who he wants Judy to be that does not do justice to Judy's own character.<sup>16</sup>

This is indicative, I suggest, of the value that Nietzsche sees in the kind of self-respect that is directed to what is unique about the bearer of self-respect. For my self-estimation to truly be self-respect, Nietzsche would say, it cannot be a respect directed at something I share with others I also find admirable, because in doing so the object of admiration is no longer myself; it is both a reductive and false version of myself. Learning to respect myself, as with learning to love myself, requires that I distinguish myself as the object of respect, and avoid indulging a fantasy of who I wish I were.

## Section VI

How, then, can Nietzsche's considerations about self-respect help us communicate the alleged vices of Kant's moral philosophy to the Kantian? We have seen that there are two

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<sup>16</sup> These complexities are exacerbated by the fact that the « Madeleine » Scottie fell in love with was in fact Judy acting as Madeleine, which means that the Madeleine that Scottie tries to revive through changing Judy is Madeleine-played-by-Judy.

reasons Nietzsche insists that my self-respect must be respect for what is unique to me: first, that if it were not, it would likely be respect only for a reduced version of myself (respect only for my social status, for instance); and second, that if it were not, it would likely be respect only for what I want myself to be (in some cases leading me to respect a projection of someone else entirely). Both of these reasons, I argue, apply to Kant's attempt to articulate a third-person approach to self-respect.

Recall that Kant thinks the moral person has self-respect only insofar as he has respect for « the (moral) man within his own person » (G 6:436), that is, only insofar as he respects the capacity for practical rationality that he shares with all other agents. But this is – as Nietzsche warns us of any form of self-respect that is not radically first-personal – only respect for a reduced version of the bearer of respect. More specifically, it is respect only for the person who has directed her self-appraisal to the fact that she has the status of a person, a bearer of dignity, rights, and practical rationality, and in the process has excluded any of her idiosyncrasies from this self-appraisal. Thus the first objection to Kant's account of self-respect that we can draw from Nietzsche runs as follows: in Kant's account, self-respect falls short of the most valuable form of self-respect in the same way that, as Nietzsche observes, the self-respect of the aristocrat falls short. In other words, Kantian self-respect is respect not for the individual, but for the category to which the individual belongs.

Moreover, because Kant's self-respect is only self-respect for humanity as such, he is committing the second error that Nietzsche counsels us to avoid: respecting ourselves not for who we are, but for a fantasy we have projected into our self-image. A Kantian might object to this on the grounds that Kant's bearer of self-respect does not relate to himself in the same way that James Stewart's Scottie relates to Judy; respecting the humanity within me does not mean that I am projecting onto myself the fantasy of a different person who is the actual object of my respect. But there is a related fantasy involved in Kant's version of self-respect. The love exemplified in *Vertigo* is the love that Scottie feels for someone he has projected onto Judy. But in other cases a lover will project a fantasy onto the loved that does not refer to any particular person, but instead to a fantasy that has been created by the lover. This may be a fiction of honour, exoticism, beauty, or any combination of a great range of virtues we will sometimes tell ourselves can be found in superlative degrees in someone we love. A significant element of this phenomenon is that, in creating a fiction of the virtue of our lover, we exclude from view the realities of the lover that do not fit with that fantasy; we must turn a blind eye to whatever might threaten our belief that our loved is someone of insurmountable virtue, just as Scottie must turn a blind eye to anything that is distinctive of Judy and that she does not share with Madeleine. This related phenomenon is sometimes known as putting somebody on a pedestal.

We might grant, then, that Kant does not build into self-respect a fantasy or ghost of another person, but still maintain that a Kantian self-respect is directed to a related kind of fantasy: that of the moral agent as such. Thus the second objection that we can raise against Kant's account of self-respect is that we can only respect ourselves in this way if we have already committed the vice of putting ourselves on a pedestal. That is, the bearer of a Kantian form of self-respect must see in himself only what Kant's moral philosophy deems worthy of esteem, and thus must direct his self-appraisal only to

the virtuous side of his character. In the process, those who respect themselves in this way must practice some form of self-denial in order to exclude from their view that which does not meet the high standard of the moral life. To borrow Nietzsche's terminology, this betrays a bad conscience that exacerbates our vulnerability to the pathologies of the ascetic ideal.