

Zarathustra's Moral Psychology

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Nietzsche's moral psychology combines his radical criticisms of morality and his insightful psychological observations. He responds to Platonic and Kantian rationalist orthodoxy by arguing that passion, not reason, constitutes our selves and our virtues. Rationalism dominates contemporary moral psychology. Christine Korsgaard (1999, 2008, 2009) argues that treating all motivation as grounded in passion won't explain the self's role in action, and John McDowell (1998) argues that it won't explain the perceptual salience of moral considerations to the virtuous. Zarathustra anticipates Korsgaard and McDowell's influential arguments and shows why they fail.¹

First I'll lay out this millennia-old historical debate. Then I'll locate Zarathustra's answer to Korsgaard in the chapter from Part I of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled "On the Despisers of the Body" (henceforth "Despisers") and his answer to McDowell in the chapter from Part I of Zarathustra entitled "On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions" (henceforth "Passions").

7.1 Hume and Nietzsche against the Rationalist Tradition

David Hume in his *Treatise* (2000), describes the rationalist orthodoxy that he and Nietzsche oppose:

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, it is said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, till it be entirely subdued, or at least brought to a conformity with that superior principle. On this method of

¹ "Zarathustra" here refers to the book, "Zarathustra" to the character.

thinking the greatest part of moral philosophy, antient and modern, seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field, as well for metaphysical arguments, as popular declamations, than this supposed pre-eminence of reason above passion. The eternity, invariableness, and divine origin of the former have been displayed to the best advantage: The blindness, uncon- stancy, and deceitfulness of the latter have been as strongly insisted on. In order to shew the fallacy of all this philosophy, I shall endeavour to prove first, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and secondly, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will. (2000:2.3.3)²

My psychological terminology may require clarification. Hume uses “passion,” also a translation for Nietzsche’s *Leidenschaft*, where contemporary philosophers use “desire.” These terms can refer to many things, including the motivational state with hedonic and attention-directing properties that I refer to here. In contemporary debates I use “desire,” defining it to have many features Hume and Nietzsche attribute to passion, but here I use “passion” for continuity with the historical texts. Passions come in different emotional flavors. One is positive desire, which includes typical passions for food, sex, and victory. Thoughts of its satisfaction excite us, and thoughts of its frustration disappoint us. (In this paper “desire” refers only to positive desire.) Another is aversion, which includes typical passions for avoiding such things as death, public humiliation, and financial disaster. Thoughts of things we’re averse to cause anxiety, and thoughts of avoiding them bring relief. Unifying desire and aversion is the Hedonic Aspect of passion: thoughts of what we want bring pleasures of excitement or relief, while thinking of not getting it brings displeasures of disappointment or anxiety.³ I take *Trieb*, translated as “drive,” to refer to a passion or a group of passions aiming at something relatively unified.⁴ Whatever “reason” is, all agree that it can form beliefs.

The rationalist view Plato and Kant accept, which Hume and Nietzsche oppose, is that beliefs with normative content can determine our motivation without any help from antecedently-existing passions. This allows beliefs about the form of the good or the categorical imperative to motivate us. Humeans deny this, claiming that belief alone cannot motivate action

² Radcliffe (1999, 2015) provides a clear articulation of Hume’s arguments for this view.

³ More precisely, “Desire that E combined with increasing subjective probability of E or vivid sensory or imaginative representation of E causes pleasure roughly proportional to the desire’s strength times the increase in probability or the vividness of the representation. (With decreasing subjective probability of E or vivid sensory or imaginative representation of not-E, it likewise causes displeasure)” (Sinhababu 2017: 28).

⁴ Sinhababu (2018).

or create new passions through reasoning.⁵ This leaves no way for Kantian or Platonic reason to direct the goals of action. Passion is necessary for all motivation, and the only reasoning that creates passions is the instrumental sort, where passion for an end produces passion for a believed means.

Plato holds that if spirit and passion fail to obey reason, the soul lacks justice, the greatest virtue. He sees passions as virtuous only insofar as they obey reason.⁶ Hume's immediate predecessors, Ralph Cudworth, Samuel Clarke, and John Balguy, emphasize another feature of Platonism. They hold that human reason has the power to grasp objective moral truths independently of sensory experience.⁷ They regard morality and mathematics as realms of objective a priori facts, following Plato's picture of reason grasping the abstract form of the good and motivating us accordingly. Hume responds to Platonic ontology and epistemology with a naturalistic ontology and an empiricist epistemology.⁸ He responds to rationalist moral psychology by arguing that passion determines the goals of action and that reason merely finds ways to achieve these goals – the Humean Theory.

If rationalist moral psychology has a greater advocate than Plato, it's Kant who argues that actions with moral worth are motivated entirely by reason's recognition of duty. Kant regards acts of will motivated by passion as heteronomous. Heteronomous willing cannot be free, rational, or morally worthy, unlike autonomous willing motivated by reason alone. This is why in the *Groundwork* Kant says of passions and other inclinations that it must "be the universal wish of every rational being to be altogether free from them" (1997: IV, 429). Here Kant reacts to the moral psychology of British sentimentalists like Hume, whose metaphysics and epistemology of causation famously roused him from his "dogmatic slumber."

Nietzsche explicitly opposes Kant and Plato's rationalist moral psychology on Humean grounds.⁹ He describes Socrates and Plato as "innocently

⁵ I formulate the Humean Theory in terms of two theses, with "A" for action, "E" for end, and "M" for means. First is the "Desire-Belief Theory of Action: One is motivated to A if and only if desire that E is combined with belief that one can raise E's probability by A-ing." Second is the "Desire-Belief Theory of Reasoning: Desire that M is created as the conclusion of reasoning if and only if the reasoning combines desire that E with belief that M would raise E's probability. It is eliminated as the conclusion of reasoning if and only if the reasoning eliminates such a combination" (Sinhababu 2018: 2). Desire thus directs all action, including all reasoning leading to action (this reasoning is about finding means to desired ends).

⁶ Frede (2017). ⁷ Gill (2007).

⁸ Beam (1996) and Kail (2009) note similarities between Nietzsche and Hume in these areas.

⁹ Leiter discusses a "Humean Nietzsche . . . who aims to explain morality naturalistically" (Leiter 2019: 6). The Humean Theory they share serves this ambition by showing how moral motivation is driven by passion rather than beliefs about non-natural moral facts.

credulous in regard to that most fateful of prejudices, that profoundest of errors, that 'right knowledge must be followed by right action' (D 116).¹⁰ He rejects Kant's conception of affectless action driven by reason: "An action demanded by the instinct of life is proved to be *right* by the pleasure that accompanies it; yet this nihilist with his Christian dogmatic entrails considered pleasure an *objection*" (A 11). He criticizes both for developing the idea that motivation is generated by conscious rational deliberation rather than pre-existing passion: "The nonsense of the last idea was taught as 'intelligible freedom' by Kant – perhaps by Plato already" (TI "The Four Great Errors" 8).

Daybreak displays Nietzsche's Humean commitments. The lengthy discussions of human reason, love and hatred, and pride and humility in Hume's *Treatise* all conclude with sections arguing that animal reason, love and hatred, and pride and humility operate similarly. Nietzsche extends the thought: "The beginnings of justice, as of prudence, moderation, bravery—in short, of all we designate as the *Socratic virtues*, are *animal*: a consequence of that drive which teaches us to seek food and elude enemies [...] it is not improper to describe the entire phenomenon of morality as animal" (D 26). Where Hume argues that beliefs alone don't motivate action, Nietzsche claims that "The most confident knowledge or faith cannot provide the strength or the ability needed for a deed, it cannot replace the employment of that subtle, manyfaceted mechanism which must first be set in motion if anything at all of an idea is to translate itself into action" (D 22). Nietzsche's account of how we control strong drives is a brilliant development of the Humean position. Nietzsche argues that "in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of another drive which is a rival of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us" (D 109). While Kantians and Platonists take cases of self-control to show that we have a type of reason that is independent of our drives and can control them, Nietzsche says that:

at bottom it is one drive which is complaining about another; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the vehemence of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive, and that a struggle is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides. (D 109)

Here Nietzsche suggests that drives explain what Kantians and Platonists call the effects of reason. As Nietzsche assigns drives the same properties as

¹⁰ The following translations are used in this chapter: *D* (1997); *GM* (1989); *GS* (1974); *Z* (1954).

Humean passions, he here develops the Humean position that passions drive all action, while reason has no independent motivational force. We might imagine Plato playing the opening against Hume for reason against passion, with Kant and Nietzsche taking over their respective sides of the chessboard for the middlegame. Nietzsche's moves go beyond Humean positions as middlegame tactics go beyond opening positions, making creative use of Humean resources to refute attacks from Kant and his rationalist followers.

How did Nietzsche come to share Hume's conception of how passion drives us? He seems to have regarded Hume only as the source of the epistemology and metaphysics that woke Kant from his dogmatic slumber. But it appears that he unwittingly absorbed Hume's practical philosophy from Schopenhauer, who regarded Hume highly and approached publishers with a proposal to translate his work into German. (Sadly for philosophy, Schopenhauer's book proposal was rejected. If you have had a book proposal rejected, you can still be a great philosopher.) When twenty-one-year-old Nietzsche read *The World as Will and Representation* with fascination, he encountered Schopenhauer's subjectivism about the good: "every good is essentially relative; for it has its essential nature only in its relation to a desiring will. Accordingly, absolute good is a contradiction" (1969: IV, 65).¹¹ Kantian and Platonic metaethical theories must deny Schopenhauer's claim, as they require goodness not grounded in passion, accessible only to reason. Hume articulates the similar subjectivist view that calling something evil merely means "you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind" (2000: 3.1.1). The section is titled "Moral distinctions not derived from reason," and the opponents against whom Hume urges this subjectivism are the British Platonists who preceded him. Nineteenth-century citation practices may have kept Nietzsche from knowing that in appreciating Schopenhauer, he was appreciating Hume. But the Humean parts of Schopenhauer's work seem to have greatly attracted him. Nietzsche shares Schopenhauer's preference for explanations in terms of primal motivational forces rather than reason, and here Schopenhauer follows Hume.

¹¹ Spinoza and Hobbes have similar views. Hume was well-acquainted with both. As Brobjer (2008) describes, Nietzsche encountered Spinoza through secondary literature only in 1881 at age thirty-five, after reading Schopenhauer at twenty-one. Wherever one begins the chain of influence leading to Nietzsche's views of motivation, Hume is a likely link.

To bring us to contemporary debates, I will present two of the most influential rationalist arguments in moral psychology – Korsgaard's argument that the Humean Theory cannot account for the self, and McDowell's argument that virtue requires responsiveness to objective reasons. Zarathustra anticipates both. I will outline his responses before exploring them deeply in the last two sections (7.2 and 7.3).

Korsgaard argues that the Humean Theory leaves it mysterious why our bodily movements are *our* actions, because it explains them in terms of passion rather than the self. "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant" (1999, 2008) describes Hume's picture of passions pushing against each other to determine action as a "Combat Model' of the soul" (2008: 133). She criticizes this model: "I think that there are a few questions Hume should have asked first, for the Combat Model makes very little sense" (2008: 100). "If the movement is to be assignable to the agent in the way that the idea of action requires, then the agent must be something over and above the forces working in her and on her, something that can intelligibly be said to determine herself to action" (2008: 134). Her criticism is that Hume leaves out the unified acting self that is the agent, only giving us a picture of the forces causing the action. And since action essentially involves a unified agent, how can this be action at all? This objection may originate with Kant, who uses "reason" and "alien influences" where Korsgaard uses "the agent" and "forces working in her and on her":

Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such a will must in a practical respect thus be attributed to every rational being. (Kant 1997: IV, 448)

Many contemporary rationalists join her in this view. Jay Wallace (2013: 633) argues that the Humean theory "leaves no real room for genuine deliberative agency. Action is traced to the operation of forces within us, with respect to which we as agents are ultimately passive, and in a picture of this kind real agency seems to drop out of view." Korsgaard (2009: 135) offers a further argument that passion cannot constitute agents: if mere parts of the self like passion drive our actions, we cannot "explain how an agent achieves the kind of unity that makes it possible to attribute her movements to her as their author."

In *Humean Nature* (2017), I respond that the passions are the self's motivational parts. This thesis, called Humean Self-Constitution, entails

that actions caused by passion are caused by parts of the self.¹² So passion motivating action is the self-motivating action. Korsgaard's unity requirement fails to explain how half-hearted, reluctant, and akratic people can be genuine agents despite their disunity. Early chapters of *Humean Nature* build up to an argument for Humean Self-Constitution, explaining how passion shapes our pleasant and unpleasant emotions, and therefore our value judgments (via its Hedonic Aspect). They also explain how passion shapes our reasoning by directing our attention toward its objects (which I call its Attentional Aspect).¹³ As *Humean Nature* defends the Humean Theory of Motivation, it argues that passion explains our actions as well. Thus, if the nature of one's self is supposed to explain such things as the nature of one's emotions, value judgments, attention, reasoning, and motivation, the passions must be parts of the self. They explain what the self is supposed to explain, empirically revealing they are parts of the self. So to treat passion as driving action is to give the self its place in action.

Zarathustra's arguments in "Despisers" convinced me of Humean Self-Constitution before I read Hume or any contemporary Humeans. Zarathustra succinctly and poetically makes the same explanatory argument I offer in *Humean Nature*. He shows that regarding the self as constituted by passion will explain not only how we're motivated, but how we think and feel. In Zarathustra's words, the "self" tells the "ego" "Feel pain here!" and "Feel pleasure here!" explaining the ego's "respect and contempt" and "why it is made to think." As Section 7.2 discusses, "Despisers" describes how passion's Hedonic and Attentional Aspects explain emotion and rational thought, including the reasoning and value judgments expressive of human selfhood. It also describes how acting selves can be disunified, rejecting Korsgaard's unity requirement. I could not properly credit Nietzsche for this in *Humean Nature*, as interpreting "Despisers" requires considerable work. Here I can do so.

McDowell argues that virtuous people recognize moral reasons for action by using a perceptual capacity that is independent of passion. Where Hume likens human psychology to animal psychology and

¹² Officially, "Agents are constituted in part by all of their desires, and aren't constituted by any other motivational states" (Sinhababu 2017: 167). This makes desire the only motivational part of the self. It allows the self to have other non-motivational parts, including belief. This follows Hume's view that the self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (2000: 1.4.6). Zarathustra develops this Humean view to address motivation.

¹³ "Desire that E disposes one to attend to things one associates with E, increasing with the desire's strength and the strength of the association" (Sinhababu 2017: 33).

Nietzsche describes morality itself as animal, McDowell (1998) writes that “reliably kind behaviour is not the outcome of a blind, non-rational habit or instinct, like the courageous behaviour – so called only by courtesy – of a lioness defending her cubs” (51). He thinks virtue also requires a “reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement that situations impose on behaviour” (51). Explaining this sensitivity to something salient in terms of a passion for it – a “non-cognitive extra that would be analogous to hunger” (70) – seems to him “highly implausible” (71). As he reiterates, “perceptions of saliences resist decomposition into ‘pure’ awareness together with appetitive states” (71). He criticizes the Humean Theory as “a philosophy of mind that insists on a strict separation between cognitive capacities and their exercise, on the one hand, and what eighteenth-century writers would classify as passions and sentiments, on the other” (200). McDowell has the cognitive capacities including a faculty of reason that perceives moral reasons and motivates action accordingly.

The phenomenology of salient moral considerations that McDowell describes is more elegantly explained by treating virtues as passions. The Hedonic and Attentional Aspects give desire and aversion a phenomenology in which their objects are salient. Hungry people attend to food, and are pleased by opportunities to eat it. Similarly, benevolent people attend to others who need help, and are pleased by opportunities to help them. Their altruistic desires thus explain the perceptual salience of others in need. People in wildernesses attend to dangerous animals, becoming anxious when they approach. Similarly, conscientious people attend to their commitments, becoming anxious if they risk being unable to fulfill them. Their aversions to violating commitments thus explain the perceptual salience of unfulfilled commitments. The Humean Theory explains “perceptions of saliences” using exactly the entities McDowell thinks it can’t – the phenomenology of passion, plus awareness of what is happening. As I argue (2016), this leaves McDowell’s additional faculty of reason explaining nothing. It’s an extravagant addition to psychology for Occam’s Razor to cut away.

Zarathustra’s picture of passions as virtues in “Passions” is founded on the salience that passion bestows on its object. Desire makes its object look good because of the Hedonic Aspect. Then desirers can see themselves as virtuous for desiring the good. Nietzsche’s view is founded on the phenomenological effects of passion that McDowell misattributes to reason. Their views also differ in that Zarathustra treats value and virtue as subjective while McDowell treats them as objective. But this difference concerns the metaphysics of value rather than moral psychology. Those

who accept Zarathustra's moral psychology and the objectivity of value, can add the claim that objective value inheres in some objects of passion.¹⁴ Zarathustra's moral psychology explains the saliences McDowell describes all the same.

While considerable recent scholarship examines Nietzsche's moral psychology, *Zarathustra* receives relatively little attention, even from scholars who do excellent work on Nietzsche's other writings.¹⁵ Many cannot find well-developed philosophical positions and arguments in the poetry of *Zarathustra*. This makes some question whether such positions and arguments are even to be found in a work of such unusual form. But while many sections of *Zarathustra* have dialogue or narrative form, "Despisers" and "Passions" largely consist in Zarathustra discussing how parts of our minds might interact with each other. While his phrasing has a Biblical flavor, the Bible itself communicates considerable descriptive content this way, as a Lutheran pastor's son would know well. So the form of these sections suggests trying to extract the ideas from the poetry as Nietzsche's father might from a Bible verse.

Listen closely to Zarathustra's poetry, and you will hear him rejecting the views of selfhood and virtue favored by Plato, Kant, and Christian ascetics in favor of a Humean view that grounds them in desire. Those who can find such views elsewhere in Nietzsche's work are encouraged to reveal them; I know of no similarly detailed articulation. I assume that Zarathustra's views in the cited passages are Nietzsche's unless textual evidence suggests otherwise, but I'll attribute these views to Zarathustra himself so that readers who think otherwise can criticize my interpretation more easily. As I deal with these sections as a whole, covering them from beginning to end, my interpretation will include more than Zarathustra's answers to Korsgaard and McDowell's arguments. This helps to support my interpretive claims and to more fully express Zarathustra's views.

7.2 How Passions Constitute Selves in "On the Despisers of the Body"

Zarathustra begins with harsh words for the despisers of the body: "I would not have them learn and teach differently, but merely say farewell

¹⁴ While Hume and Nietzsche agree that value is not an objective feature of reality, their views of moral value differ. Hume thinks moral value can be retained in noncognitivist or subjectivist form. As Foenander (2011) shows, Nietzsche is an error theorist.

¹⁵ Alfano (2019), Anderson and Cristy (2017), Mitchell (2020).

to their own bodies – and thus become silent.” As I will soon argue with textual evidence from later in the “Despisers” section, “body” refers to one’s passions collectively.¹⁶ Zarathustra argues that despising the body is being averse to one’s own passions, and therefore one’s self. Against the despisers’ assumption that their selves are independent from passion, he advances Humean Self-Constitution, which treats selves as constituted by passion.

Zarathustra considers two ways of speaking about oneself. First, one might say “Body am I, and soul.” He describes this as a child’s way of speaking, though he makes clear that he does not reject it: “And why should one not speak like children?” He compares it to what the “awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.” What the awakened and knowing say entails what the children say. The children indeed are both body and soul. But they have not yet chosen between a dualistic view that the body and soul are two distinct and independent things, or the view that the soul is something about the body and not a separate thing – in metaphysical parlance, constituted by the body. The awakened and knowing reject dualism and see the body as constituting the soul in some way.

What does Zarathustra mean by “body” and “soul?” His one similarly extensive discussion of body–soul relations is told to the crowd in the marketplace: “Once the soul looked contemptuously upon the body, and then this contempt was the highest: she wanted the body meager, ghastly, and starved. Thus she hoped to escape it and the earth. Oh, this soul herself was still meager, ghastly, and starved: and cruelty was the lust of this soul” (*Z* Prologue 3). Here the soul is presented as having aversive attitudes toward the body – cruelty and contempt. Humean Self-Constitution treats this as the body containing aversions toward the whole of itself. Zarathustra then considers how the body is disposed toward the soul, asking “But you, too, my brothers, tell me: what does your body proclaim of your soul? Is not your soul poverty and filth and wretched contentment?” The body can proclaim such things in a fairly literal sense if it is constituted by mental states like passions. It is unclear how body parts like the elbow or the esophagus would proclaim anything of the soul. But passions can easily be understood as proclaiming such criticisms of a soul that frustrates their satisfaction. This supports interpreting “body” as referring to all of one’s passions, with “soul” referring to the subset of

¹⁶ I follow Richardson (2013), who understands “body” as consisting of instinctual drives. He notes that in “Despisers,” “body” seems broader, fitting my view that it includes all drives.

these passions currently controlling one's reflective thought.¹⁷ Passions figure more straightforwardly in the relations Zarathustra describes than flesh itself would.

If "body" refers to passions, conflicts between body and soul are conflicts between passions. For the soul to look contemptuously upon the body is for the passions dominating reflective thought to conflict with other passions. Then reflective thought judges passion harshly, as the *Genealogy* illustrates. Slave moralists' unselfish values condemn their selfish passions; the bad conscience delivers harsh judgments of one's immoral passions; ascetics loathe their own animal passions and seek to dominate them. The *Genealogy* tells us that reflective condemnation of the body in each of these cases is constituted by sublimated passion. Slave moralists have passions for revenge against the masters; the bad conscience is an aggressive passion opposed to one's other passions; ascetics have passions for power over their animal passions. Nietzsche bemoans how these passions conflict with bodily passions, hoping they can be realigned with the body. Here Zarathustra similarly agrees with bodily passion that the soul should change.

The next sentence of "Despisers" describes the body as "a great reason, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd." The last three metaphors treat the body as composed of separate things that can sometimes unite, which is how Humean Self-Constitution treats the passions composing the self. Calling the body a plurality or a herd implies that separate entities compose it. Calling it war implies conflict between these entities. Unity is achieved when the plurality has one sense, when war gives way to peace, and when the herd follows its shepherd.¹⁸ These metaphors describe how passions can conflict, or be aligned and unified. Zarathustra then says, "An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call 'spirit' – a little instrument and toy of your great reason." Here Zarathustra repeatedly identifies one's "great reason" with the body. This helps us understand Zarathustra's subsequent remark that "the body and its great reason . . . does not say 'I,' but does 'I.'" According to the Humean Theory, all my action is driven by my passions. If the balance of my passions favors an action (given what

¹⁷ This thesis is stronger than Humean Self-Constitution, which allows other mental states like belief to be non-motivational parts of the self. But since any view that includes the passions in the self will answer Korsgaard's objection, the differences are not important here.

¹⁸ This can be achieved by stronger drives subordinating weaker drives, as Richardson (2013) and Katsafanas (2016) describe.

I believe about its effects), I will do it. Otherwise, I won't. This is why my passions collectively are what does "I."

The "spirit," or "little reason," seems to be one of the self's information-gathering instruments, much like the senses. The German term is *Geist*, also translated as "intellect." Zarathustra describes how the self "seeks with the eyes of the senses" and "listens with the ears of the spirit." He describes what sense and spirit detect as never having "its end in itself," saying that they mislead us into thinking they are "the end of all things." The German expressions are *in sich sein Ende* and *aller Dinge Ende*, both reminiscent of famous Kantian expressions. One is *Ding an sich*, "for things-in-themselves," the Kantian term for the metaphysical foundation of reality. Another is *Zweck an sich*, for the Kantian conception of rational agency as an end in itself, deserving respect rather than mere use as a means. *Zweck* is often translated as "purpose." *Ende* is closer to the meanings of the English word "end" as a spatial or temporal final part. While the connection to Kant would have been unmistakable with *Zweck*, Zarathustra generally doesn't name-drop philosophical concepts of Nietzsche's era so explicitly, and *Ende* goes well with his spatial metaphor that the self is "behind" spirit and sense.¹⁹ Zarathustra rejects the rationalist view that the spirit is the end of all things, behind all of one's psychological activity. Instead, he takes the totality of one's desires, which makes up one's self, to be behind everything. He notes that the self is behind the ego too.

Having identified the body with "great reason," Zarathustra further identifies it with the "mighty ruler" and "unknown sage" called the "self," saying that it stands behind one's thoughts and feelings. Zarathustra also says of the self, "he is your body." While Zarathustra uses a bewildering variety of terms for psychological entities throughout this section, he clarifies that many of them refer to the same things. This leaves us with only two psychological components at the end. He says that the "body," "great reason," and the "self" all refer to one thing that stands behind and controls another thing, variously referred to as the "soul," "little reason," the "spirit," and the "ego."

Zarathustra then describes how the self controls the ego's thoughts: by making it feel pleasure and pain. Since our passions explain much of what pleases and displeases us, this is further evidence that passions constitute

¹⁹ Nietzsche generally avoids placing *Zarathustra* in a specific real-world place or time. Consider the one substantive change from *GS* 342 and *Z:I* "Prologue" 1 – "Lake Urmi" becomes "the lake of his home." He likewise avoids distinctively Kantian phrases.

the body, which Zarathustra also calls the self. Humean Self-Constitution has the self consisting of all passion and controlling the ego, which is responsible for rational thought. Zarathustra expresses this in the voice of the self: “I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its concepts.” The self says to the ego, “Feel pain here!” and “Feel pleasure here!” making the ego think about how to avoid whatever pained it and attain whatever pleased it. This is how the ego is “*made* to think.” Humean Self-Constitution gives the passions that constitute the self considerable control over pleasure and displeasure, via the Hedonic Aspect. Being pleased by something makes us think it is good. Being displeased by something makes us think it is bad. Zarathustra explains that the ego is not independently discovering goodness or badness, as its advocates who distinguish it from passion might think. Passions constituting the self explain these feelings. This is Zarathustra’s explanatory argument for Humean Self-Constitution, which I develop in *Humean Nature*.

What is the ego, and what is the significance of the self’s control over it? “Ich” is usually translated as “I,” but Kaufmann renders it as “ego” when Nietzsche uses it as an ordinary singular noun, as in “the self says to the ego.”²⁰ The previous section, “On the Afterworldly,” is the only one where “ego” is used as much as “On the Despisers of the Body.” There Zarathustra describes how the ego can recover from an unhealthy focus on the afterlife and learn to love the body and this life:

Indeed, this ego and the ego’s contradiction and confusion still speak most honestly of its being—this creating, willing, valuing ego, which is the measure and value of things. And this most honest being, the ego, speaks of the body and still wants the body, even when it poetizes and raves and flutters with broken wings. It learns to speak ever more honestly, this ego: and the more it learns, the more words and honors it finds for body and earth.

Zarathustra understands the ego to have a central role in creating, willing, and valuing. The ego can perform these operations favorably or unfavorably toward the body. When it regards the body unfavorably, the result may be the sort of internal conflict between values and passions described in the *Genealogy* – slave moralists opposing their own violent passions, the bad conscience condemning unruly passion, and ascetics wishing to control their animal passions. When the ego regards the body favorably, values and passions are in line with each other. This is psychological health.

²⁰ Here he follows James Strachey’s influential translation of Freud’s *The Ego and the Id* (Freud 1960).

Internal conflicts between the self and the ego (now referred to as spirit) are Zarathustra's next topic. He tells the despisers of the body that their own values are merely expressions of their passions. He explains the pleasant and unpleasant feelings explaining the phenomenology of the spirit's valuing in terms of the body's ability to generate the experiences of pleasure and pain: "The creative self created respect and contempt; it created pleasure and pain. The creative body created the spirit as a hand for its will." Just as animals are pleased to discover food, ascetics feel the pleasure of high self-regard when they reflect on their feats of self-control. And just as animals are displeased to have their food taken away, ascetics feel the displeasure of contempt when they reflect on giving in to temptations they regard as beneath them. The hedonic phenomenology of respect and contempt reveals that they are manifestations of the same bodily passions toward which ascetics are contemptuous.

Having laid out these premises of his critique, Zarathustra delivers the conclusion: "Even in your folly and contempt, you despisers of the body, you serve your self." Fifteen sentences earlier, Zarathustra clarified that "body" and "self" refer to the same thing. Here he tells the despisers of the body that they themselves serve their bodies. If the body is all of one's passions, Zarathustra is telling the despisers of the body that their passions have turned against passion itself. The ascetic's passion not to be ruled by mere passions is one example. The Kantian passion to escape heteronomy by not letting one's passions rule oneself is another. Ascetics and Kantians both deny that these cherished motivations are merely passions. The hedonic phenomenology these motivations share with uncontroversial instances of passion is evidence against their claims.

Zarathustra concludes this section by diagnosing what has gone wrong with the despisers of the body. They view worldly things with too much aversion and too little desire. If they had stronger desires for worldly things, these passions would engross them in creative activity and enjoyment of life. But a self that looks on standard objects of passion with aversion instead "wants to die and turns away from life." As he tells them, "Your self wants to go under, and that is why you have become despisers of the body. For you are no longer able to create beyond yourselves."

7.3 How Passions Explain Perceptual Saliences in "Passions"

"Passions" describes how a despiser of the body might be healed, with passions unifying in favor their worldly objects and becoming virtues.

Central to Zarathustra's explanation is the idea McDowell rejects – that passions make their objects salient.²¹

The "Passions" section begins with Zarathustra advising against referring to one's virtue in the words of a public language. Instead, one's virtue should be "too exalted for the familiarity of names." His concern is unusual: if you name your virtue, you will have its "name in common with the people" and "become one of the people and herd with your virtue." No other virtue ethicist I know of argues against naming one's virtues. Traditional virtue ethicists explicitly discuss virtues like honesty and kindness at length. They might not see any possibility of leaving one's virtues "inexpressible and nameless," thinking the virtues have all received names in a public language. What motivates Zarathustra's unusual view? While he certainly appreciates distinctive forms of individual excellence, it is hard to see why naming one's virtue would undermine one's individuality. Perhaps he thinks that naming the virtue would lead others to develop it, undermining one's distinctiveness. As I will explain, the subjective nature of value on Zarathustra's view prevents anything from being objectively virtuous, and thus describable as a virtue by everyone.

Zarathustra tells us how to speak of our virtues:

Then speak and stammer: "This is my good; this I love; it pleases me wholly; thus alone do I want the good. I do not want it as divine law; I do not want it as human statute and need: it shall not be a signpost for me to overearths and paradises. It is an earthly virtue that I love: there is little prudence in it, and least of all the reason of all men. But this bird built its nest with me: therefore I love and caress it; now it dwells with me, sitting on its golden eggs."

Zarathustra rejects traditional views of virtue as objective and universal. He tells us to accept the subjectivity of virtue with open eyes, explicitly rejecting philosophical devices for giving it a more objective nature. These include divine law, human law, prudence, and any sort of universal reason. Moreover, having a virtue is not a matter of choice or rational decision to have the virtue. Instead, virtue is likened to a bird that chooses for herself where to build her nest. Zarathustra then refers to "your virtues" as "passions you enjoyed," implying that virtues are passions. To demonstrate the significance of this Humean commitment, I will explain how it makes virtues subjective, individual, and not determined by rational choice.

²¹ Katsafanas (2013b) notes that drives direct attention. This property of drives is explained by the attention-directing powers of the passions that compose them.

First, it is natural to understand passions as making their objects subjectively valuable. Passions confer the subjective values of deliciousness on food and beauty on art. Platitudes like “there’s no accounting for taste” and “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” express the subjective nature of these values. Because desires can make their objects subjectively valuable, they can turn themselves into subjective virtues.²² This is a consequence of the generally accepted view that desiring the good is virtuous.²³ Desire makes its object good to the desirer. Desire for food makes its object delicious to the hungry. Aesthetic desire makes its object beautiful to the appreciator or creator. The creative desire driving Nietzsche to write the above passage of *Zarathustra* made it beautiful to him. His desire therefore aimed at creating the value that is beauty, and made itself a virtue, as desires for valuable things are. In third-personal admiration of aesthetic virtue, we admire other people who have created artworks we appreciate. If Nietzsche appreciates Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir*, regarding it as aesthetically valuable, he will admire Stendhal as an artist for creating it.²⁴ Here another person is the artist, but admiration works similarly when one is the artist oneself. Artists delighted by their own artworks can admire themselves for valuing and creating wonderful things, seeing virtue first-personally. Zarathustra recognizes that all desires make their objects subjectively valuable, and therefore make themselves subjective virtues.²⁵

This is why Zarathustra tells us to stammer of our virtues. Such stammering won’t express the proposition that our passions are virtues as an objective truth, but rather as a subjective truth relativized to ourselves as people who have these passions. If Nietzsche regards *Zarathustra* as beautiful, the passion that drove him to write it will be a virtue to him. But if Quine *Zarathustra* simply unpleasant to read, Nietzsche’s creative passion will be a vice to Quine. Calling *Zarathustra* good or Nietzsche’s creative passion an artistic virtue falls short of standards of objective truth, just as stammering falls short of standards of clear expression. But Zarathustra commends stammering to us anyway, treating it as the only way the good can be appropriately discussed.²⁶

²² Sinhababu (2015) uses this to algebraically derive a formula for the virtue of agents.

²³ Hurka (2001) defends this view, noting historical advocates including Aristotle.

²⁴ Nietzsche defends Stendhal’s view of aesthetic appreciation as grounded in creativity against Kant’s rationalist view (*GM* III:6).

²⁵ Hunt (1991) requires some agency to assign functions to passions in order to make them virtues, while I think the passion itself can do the work.

²⁶ Gooding-Williams (2001) understands stammering as involving a frustration of intentions. But Zarathustra does not here express any clear wish that the stammerer’s intentions be frustrated. He does however explicitly reject many conceptions of non-subjective value.

Second, virtue grounded in passion this way is an individual matter.²⁷ If being virtuous were a matter of desiring to promote an objective good, it wouldn't be so individual. Passions, however, are individualized psychological states that others may not share, and they confer subjective value on things that may not have any prior objective value. As the Humean theory suggests, passions don't arise automatically in response to objective value – otherwise we might be more morally motivated and more similar in our motivations than we actually are.

Third, the Humean Theory explains why a virtue that is a passion would have “little prudence in it, and least of all the reason of all men.” If all reason can do is serve and obey passions, reasoning that it would be prudent for me to change my passions in a particular way will not make my passions become that way. I can gain instrumental motivation from reasoning. If I desire whiskey and believe that I can get it at the bar, I can desire to go to the bar. But this is different from prudential reasoning, which proceeds from belief about what advances one's well-being rather than desire. If I believe that not desiring whiskey anymore would enhance my well-being, that will not end the desire.

Zarathustra holds that virtues are passions and that they make their objects perceptually salient, as passions generally do. Zarathustra's stammerer clearly sees something as good. Recognizing that this is just how passion makes its object look allows Humeans to explain the perceptual saliences McDowell discusses. Desire for food makes us see it as delicious. Desire for those we love makes us see them as beautiful. Contrary to McDowell's rationalist assumption, perceptions of these saliences simply are perceptions of the objects of passions. If virtue makes its objects look that way, it is evidence that virtues are passions.²⁸

Zarathustra suggests that having strong and unified passions prevents one from worrying about whether the objects of passion have objective value.²⁹ The Humean Theory explains this. To care about whether the objects of one's passions have objective value, one needs a passion for them to have objective value. If nothing has objective value, this passion will not

²⁷ Higgins (1987) emphasizes the individuality of passion.

²⁸ Swanton (2015) attributes a similar combination of sentimentalism and response-dependent virtue ethics to Hume and Nietzsche, also contrasting this with McDowell's view.

²⁹ Hayward (2019) makes this point about love. Lenman (2014) considers a broad range of ordinary passions.

be satisfied, and one will look upon one's passions with dissatisfaction. But if one lacks such a passion, one will not care about whether the objects of passion have objective value. We have such attitudes toward obviously subjective sorts of value. Moral error theorists, who believe that nothing is objectively valuable, can still regard food as subjectively valuable. Their passions for food make it delicious to them and motivate them to eat it, despite their belief that it lacks objective value. Hungry people usually aren't averse to eating food that lacks objective value, just as they are not averse to using utensils that lack a decorative pattern. One might require a truly great meal to stammer, "This is my food; this I love; it pleases me wholly; thus alone do I want the food." But this would actually fit Zarathustra's metaphor in the chapter from Part II entitled "On Those who are Sublime": "all of life is a dispute over taste and tasting. Taste—that is at the same time weight and scales and weigher." The hungry can regard their food as valuable while denying that this value is grounded in divine law or any other objective and metaphysically robust source.

Zarathustra then describes how people like the despisers of the body from the previous section can become virtuous: "Once you suffered passions and called them evil. But now you have only your virtues left: they grew out of your passions. You commended your highest goal to the heart of these passions: then they become your virtues and passions you enjoyed." This seems to be possible no matter what one's passions are, as Zarathustra lists many often criticized passions as becoming virtues: "And whether you came from the tribe of the choleric or of the voluptuous or of the fanatic or of the vengeful, in the end all your passions became virtues and all your devils, angels." Several metaphors for the transformation of bad things into good things follow – "Out of your poisons you brewed your balsam."

How do devilish passions become angelic virtues? Zarathustra follows his metaphors about passions becoming virtues by saying "And nothing evil grows out of you henceforth, unless it be the evil that grows out of the fight among your virtues." If evil grows out of a fight between virtues, and virtues are passions, evil will grow out of a fight between passions. This explains why the passions were not virtues beforehand: other passions were fighting them. This is one source of dissatisfaction with merely subjective value – a passion for not having passions toward objects of merely subjective value. From the perspective of this passion, many of one's other passions are evil. Slave morality, the bad conscience, and ascetic ideals all

promote passions hostile to life. Nietzsche opposes them all in their battle against our natural instinctual passions.

The rest of the section discusses the danger of a conflict between one's passions, the same thing that prevented passions from being virtues before. Zarathustra says that "if you are fortunate you have only one virtue and no more." While the unity of the virtues has long been a popular idea among virtue ethicists, Zarathustra here embraces a disunity of virtues. Rather than being compatible with each other or even necessary for each other's presence, "Each virtue is jealous of the others, and jealousy is a terrible thing. Virtues too can perish of jealousy."

Zarathustra's subjectivism about value and a standard view of the value-virtue relationship together entail his thesis that strong and well-unified sets of passions are virtuous, while weak passions and conflicts between passions detract from virtue. This standard view is that desires for good things are virtuous, desires for bad things are vicious, aversions to good things are vicious, and aversions to bad things are virtuous. These relations connect moral value, virtue, and vice, but they may also connect nonmoral value, virtue, and vice as well. Then if every desire makes its object good, as subjectivism says, every desire is to some extent virtuous – it is a desire for something good. Every aversion is virtuous too – it makes its object bad, so it is an aversion to something bad. Strong passions are especially virtuous. A strong desire is an intense love of something wonderful, and a strong aversion is firm opposition to a terrible thing. Weak passions do not do much to raise one's virtue, as they are weak motivations toward things of insignificant value.

This also entails that conflict between passions detracts from virtue, as Zarathustra explains later in the section. Having some desire and some aversion for something makes it somewhat good and somewhat bad to you. Then you desire the bad and are averse to the good, which are vices. They offset your virtue in desiring the good and being averse to the bad. Those averse to their own desires and to the objects of their own desires – despisers of the body – have especially vicious character. All their desires are bad, and their desires are for subjectively bad things. This is why Zarathustra inveighs so strongly against them. His view explains why both desire and aversion have a complicated perceptual salience. Dieters see delicious but unhealthy foods as guilty pleasures, bearing both positive and negative value at once. When instinctual passions conflict with ascetic ideals, the bad conscience, or values created by *ressentiment*, people see value in a similarly conflicted way.

As “Despisers” and “Passions” together reveal, Zarathustra doesn’t want us to see value with such conflicted eyes. Strong and unified passions let us see value in its full glory. Recognizing the subjectivity of this value might leave us able only to stammer of it. But even those who stammer can see its full beauty if their passions are strong and pure.³⁰

³⁰ These ideas came to me early in my studies, so I must thank all the instructors and classmates who tolerated my wild enthusiasm about them in Nietzsche seminars. Two wonderful teachers deserve special thanks. Melissa Barry introduced me to analytic metaethics and saw promise in the term paper where I first advanced this response to Korsgaard. Her encouragement led me to develop it further in my undergraduate thesis under the kind and helpful supervision of Raphael Woolf. Their thoughtful support showed me that ideas from *Zarathustra* could impress philosophers working in other areas, giving me confidence to do the work that launched my career.