

Nietzsche's Naturalist Morality of Breeding

A Critique of Eugenics as Taming

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Introduction

Nietzsche's endorsement of a "morality of breeding" (*Züchtung*), which he opposes to the morality of "taming" or "domestication" (*Zähmung*), invites worry that his philosophy may be compatible with ethically dangerous forms of eugenics and, consequently, with the historically associated practices of discrimination, racism, and genocide.¹ While there is a general consensus that Nietzsche does not actively or directly endorse racial discrimination or political violence, the failure to clearly exclude such egregious views would be sufficient reason to seriously question any major positive contribution Nietzsche might make to ethical philosophy.²

In this paper, I directly oppose Nietzsche's morality of breeding to all forms of comparative eugenics. By comparative eugenics, I have in mind any eugenic program that identifies benefit or harm to individuals or the species on the basis of comparatively evaluated traits. For example, to genetically engineer intelligence or talent for the purpose of making an individual competitive in the economic, cultural, or social spheres would count as comparative eugenics, since in this context ability must be greater than the norm to count as improved.

I will argue, further, that Nietzschean breeding is directly opposed to both positive and negative forms of comparative eugenics, that is, to both

the genetic promotion of beneficial traits and the genetic elimination of harmful ones. While this allows for the possibility that Nietzschean breeding might be compatible with non-comparative eugenics, the category is sufficiently broad to include the most ethically dangerous historical forms, as well as contemporary forms that, while ethically controversial, are generally perceived to be more innocuous. It includes the forms of Social Darwinism that were common in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia throughout the twentieth century, with their comparative conceptions of health and hygiene, the racial eugenic theories of National Socialism, with its comparative evaluations of racial superiority, and the contemporary liberal or voluntary forms, with their comparatively grounded conceptions of ability and disability.

I will begin by explaining Nietzsche's contrast between moralities of breeding and taming. I will argue that the ethical danger of comparative eugenics is grounded in its status as a form of taming, which promotes positively evaluated character types through the active elimination of negatively evaluated ones. The morality of taming—and, consequently, comparative eugenics—is not an authentic form of selection, but in fact a disguised de-selection: the production of anti-types through the elimination of de-selected traits. Consequently, taming tends necessarily toward violence as the elimination of de-selected forms of human life.

In contrast, Nietzsche's notion of breeding indicates a morality that selects traits and types by protecting them from de-selection—specifically, by destroying moral ideas, values, and practices designed to weaken or eliminate natural traits. Such a morality tends not toward the destruction but preservation of types; its negativity targets not life, but ideas and practices that disable and disempower forms of life.

I will argue, further, that the fundamental ethical difference between breeding and taming, and so between Nietzschean morality and eugenics, is found in their attitudes toward the natural world. The violence of eugenics as taming is grounded in its status as anti-natural, while Nietzsche's morality of breeding resists violence through its foundational affirmation of the conditions and limitations of the natural world—that is, through a form of moral naturalism.

Finally, I will apply my interpretation of breeding and taming to two cases of comparative eugenics: the historical case of discriminatory racial eugenics and the debate surrounding so-called designer baby cases in contemporary theories of liberal eugenics. I will argue that Nietzsche must resolutely condemn both as forms of the anti-natural morality of taming, to which the morality of breeding is diametrically opposed.

Breeding as the Cultural and Biological Selection of Psychological Types

As many commentators have noted, Nietzsche uses the language of breeding (*züchten*) both literally and figuratively, to refer to both biological and cultural methods of selecting, promoting, and enhancing human traits and abilities.³ However, he principally uses this language to describe moral and social values, practices, and institutions as means of human transformation.⁴ For example, in the *On the Genealogy of Morality's* description of the “breeding” of an “animal with the right to make promises,”⁵ Nietzsche describes a process not of reproductive selection, but of sociocultural character production.⁶ Individuals are made “necessary, uniform . . . calculable” through the “morality of mores and the social straightjacket” (*GMI*: 2).

Likewise, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche's discussion of breeding focuses on the influence of education, religious instruction, and moral discipline: “Asceticism and puritanism are almost indispensable means for educating and ennobling a race” (*BGE* 61). And, when discussing the ancient Greek city-state as an example of “an arrangement for breeding,” Nietzsche again emphasizes social practices: moral severity in “the education of youth, in their arrangements for women, in their marital customs, in the relation of old and young, in their penal laws” (*BGE* 262).

Even where these practices include biological means of selection, such as marital customs, Nietzsche's constant emphasis upon moral practices and psychological traits indicates that the aim of breeding is to produce a psychological and social kind, not a biological type. Moreover, even as a means, breeding is only secondarily biological, since the psychological type that is to be reproduced through breeding is itself cultivated through social training, rather than through biological inheritance. In other words, biological means are attractive to Nietzsche only given his Lamarckian belief in the inheritance of culturally acquired traits. For example, when he explicitly contrasts discipline (*Zucht*) of body and soul (or “thoughts and feelings”) in *Twilight of the Idols*, he identifies the former with disciplined activity. To “convince the body” requires the “internalization” of behavior through habit: “one's society, residence, dress, sexual gratification . . . a significant and select demeanor, an obligation to live only among men who do not ‘let themselves go’” (*TI* “Expeditions” 47). Consequently, the intended contrast is of volition and habit, rather than culture and biology, as opposing means of selecting human types.

With this in mind, in my discussion I will assume that breeding refers to the selection of psychologically, not biologically, identified types. And I

will focus on breeding and taming as general categories, not specific instances, so I will not attempt to identify which specific traits or character types a Nietzschean morality of breeding would promote. This question, while important, is not central to my topic: I would like to determine, not what kind of human being Nietzsche wishes to promote, but in what way he wishes to accomplish that promotion, as well as how his methods of achieving his own ideal forms of human personality and life might affect those forms to which he is opposed.

In addition, I will not address the ethical and political question of authority—that is, whether or not it is a process to be effected coercively through the state, non-coercively through social institutions, or individually on the level of values and practices.⁷ This question does not bear on the ethical status of Nietzsche's notion of breeding in relation to eugenics, since any coercive form of human improvement, not just breeding, is ethically problematic on grounds unrelated to means or aim.

Finally, it should also be noted that Nietzsche occasionally uses *züchten* in a broad sense that refers to any attempt to promote specific human types. In this sense, breeding is not opposed to taming. Instead, it includes taming as one particularly harmful form of the broader, normatively neutral category.⁸ We could, then, contrast breeding and taming as positive and negative forms of breeding in this more general sense.⁹ However, to avoid confusion, I will use “breeding” only in the narrower sense in which it is distinct from and opposed to taming.

Breeding as Selective Empowerment, Taming as De-Selective Disempowerment

I will begin by showing that Nietzsche's distinction of moralities of breeding and taming is continuous with his critical contrast, in *Twilight of the Idols*, of natural and anti-natural forms of morality. We can identify breeding as natural, and taming as anti-natural, in three key ways: first, in their effects upon natural affects and abilities (their relation to human nature); second, in their consequences for the natural diversity of types in the human species (their relation to natural contingency); and third, in the destructiveness of their methods of morally transforming humanity (their relation to natural forms of change). I will first consider their effects upon human nature.

Nietzsche's notion of moral breeding does not imply a strong conflict between natural and artificial forms of development. Breeding is not a radical departure from, or against, natural selection.¹⁰ Although usually translated as “breeding,” “discipline,” or “cultivation,” *Züchtung* can also

suggest “selection,” as in the title of H.G. Bronn’s influential 1860 German edition of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, which translates “natural selection” as *natürliche Züchtung*. This accidental interpretive twist in the German reception of Darwin is fortuitous, since for Nietzsche there is no essential divide between natural and non-natural selection. Breeding and selection both refer to the development of the species through the preservation, reproduction, or extinction of traits and types—a process that remains natural, whether the product of accident or human intervention, because both processes operate through the contingent preservation of naturally originated traits.¹¹

Nevertheless, Nietzsche does believe there are “natural” and “anti-natural” moralities and, consequently, anti-natural ways of intervening in the process of natural selection. Anti-natural moralities are distinctive in their negative foundation, method, and purpose: they express a “condemnation” of “the instincts of life,” while natural moralities are “dominated by an instinct of life” (*TI* “Morality” 4). Nietzsche does not, of course, consider every negation, limitation, or restriction of natural instinct to be a “condemnation.” Rather, an instinct is condemned by a morality when that morality seeks to completely eradicate its influence and to prevent every form and instance of its satisfaction.

Anti-natural moralities are, consequently, against nature in the sense that they do not simply alter or enhance the natural process of selection, but actively oppose or work against it: they do not select, but rather de-select; they do not breed traits into individuals and the species, but rather breed them out.¹² They produce supposed improvement by removing undesirable natural traits rather than by authentically selecting, choosing from, and preserving desirable natural traits.

In contrast, natural moralities are authentically selective, because they directly affirm and preserve traits, and only indirectly and accidentally negate non-selected traits. Natural moral negations are indirect, because they serve more primary affirmations. When a natural morality condemns, it does so in order to promote another affect, instinct, or trait: “Some commandment of life is fulfilled through a certain canon of ‘shall’ and ‘shall not’” (*TI* “Morality” 4). The condemnations of natural moralities are merely apparent rather than true negations because they are aimed at negative values or actions; they negate only negations: “Some hindrance and hostile element on life’s road is thereby removed” (*TI* “Morality” 4).

Consequently, Nietzsche’s distinction of selective and de-selective moralities helpfully clarifies how a morality can condemn while remaining consistent with the affirmation of the natural world. A natural morality can condemn only what directly negates an aspect of life—what itself

condemns in the strong sense of seeking to exterminate. For this reason, Nietzsche characterizes the negative aspect of natural morality not as true negation, not as annihilation, but as transformation: a natural morality tries to “spiritualize, beautify, deify” a passion, in contrast to anti-natural moralities, which seek to “exterminate” (*vernichten*), “excise” (*ausschneiden*), or “castrate” the passions and, in so doing, to eliminate the variation they bring to human types (*TI* “Morality” 1).

This distinction of negative and positive *objects* of condemnation clarifies Nietzsche’s seemingly contradictory call for a “pruning” (*beschneiden*) of the contemporary individual’s contradictory instincts. Nietzsche argues that because these instincts “destroy one another,” it is necessary that “at least one of these instinct-systems should be paralyzed beneath an iron pressure, so as to permit another to come into force, become strong, become master” (*TI* “Expeditions” 41). How does this technique of “pruning” differ from the “excision” practiced by anti-natural morality?

Our first clue to their difference is in Nietzsche’s contrast of *beschneiden* (to cut back, pare) and *ausschneiden* (to cut out or away). Anti-natural morality tries to completely eradicate the instinct, to remove it entirely from one’s personality. Nietzsche’s call to “prune” a contradictory instinct, on the contrary, requires that we cut *back* or moderate the instinct. The instinct is only temporarily “paralyzed” beneath an “iron pressure” until another instinct has developed sufficient strength to master it. The result, then, is not the complete paralysis or extinction of the instinct, but instead its incorporation into an order and hierarchy of instincts—in other words, its moderation.

So, the first difference between natural and anti-natural ways of controlling an instinct is simply that a natural morality reduces a troublesome instinct’s power, while an anti-natural morality tries to destroy it. The second, and perhaps more crucial, difference bears on what *form* of instinct is the object of “cutting back” or “cutting away.” I have said that natural morality never truly “condemns” because it negates only values, instincts, and practices that are directly hostile to life—it only condemns what condemns. It is in this sense that we should understand Nietzsche’s claim that the contemporary individual’s instincts *contradict* (*widersprechen*), rather than merely conflict with, one another. They do not hinder, but destroy (*zerstören*) each other.

This conflict is not based merely in accidental differences in instinctual aims. It is possible only given the presence of *anti-natural* instincts—of incorporated values and behaviors that are specifically aimed *against* other instincts, which directly negate rather than merely obstruct other instincts.¹³ Consequently, while natural morality only limits or restrains

natural instincts, it can consistently eliminate anti-natural ones. For the excision of an anti-natural instinct does not harm a positive ability, only the negative ability to weaken other abilities. To “prune” a self-contradictory soul is to empower and enable it, not “paralyze” or weaken it.

This is also the decisive difference between moralities of breeding and taming: “Both the taming [*Zähmung*] of the beast man and the breeding [*Züchtung*] of a certain species has been called ‘improvement’ [*Besserung*]” (*TI* “Improvers” 2). However, taming does not truly improve individuals: “Whoever knows what goes on in menageries is doubtful whether the beasts in them are ‘improved’ [*verbessert*]. They are weakened, they are made less harmful, they become sickly beasts through the depressive emotion of fear, through pain, through injuries, through hunger” (*TI* “Improvers” 2). Consistent with anti-natural morality, taming is a condemnation, a negation, a removal of characteristics: sickness, fear, and pain as the direct negation of health, confidence, and happiness. Although Nietzsche does not directly describe the contrasting form of breeding, its character is clear in contrast: if taming weakens and sickens, then breeding strengthens and enhances health. While it might be objected that this claim depends on Nietzsche’s questionable evaluative assumptions about strength and health, it is, on the contrary, a simple, non-evaluative, and substantive distinction: regardless of the value we attribute to an ability, taming disempowers and disables, while breeding empowers and enables.¹⁴

Consider a literal example: while I might, in the process of breeding a horse for its swiftness, breed out other traits such as the horse’s unique color, the negative effect on other traits is contingent, extrinsic to my purpose. Breeding is, consequently, aptly described as a form of “cultivation” in two senses. First, it cultivates in the sense of promoting positive characteristics rather than destroying negative ones. Second, it cultivates in the sense of tending to and working with a natural process, rather than directly imposing or creating new forms. Breeding cultivates natural traits by preserving and protecting their natural reproduction, not by introducing or engineering new traits.¹⁵

Of course, it might be argued that Nietzsche’s frequent characterization of the higher type as a product of self-overcoming, discipline, and self-mastery suggests a more positive and individualistic form of breeding, the active self-introduction of new traits rather than their protection and preservation. Nietzsche’s “highest type of free man” is characterized by “the maximum of authority and discipline toward oneself” (*TI* “Expeditions” 38). Goethe, for example, “disciplined himself to a whole, he created himself” (*TI* “Expeditions” 49). Even where human enhancement is not the product of personal discipline, Nietzsche describes it as the product of a

creative, productive social or cultural form of discipline: “What is essential ‘in heaven and on earth’ seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be obedience over a long period of time and in a single direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for the sake of which it is worth to live on earth” (*BGE* 188).

Such passages misleadingly suggest a voluntaristic morality in which higher individuals are not products of breeding but self-produced. Yet Nietzsche consistently counters and qualifies such suggestions. Although higher types possess greater authority over themselves, this is only the outcome of a conflict of drives: “Freedom means that the manly instincts that delight in war and victory have gained mastery over the other instincts” (*TI* “Expeditions” 38). Freedom is not the result of individual agency, but of conditioned necessity, of a danger which “compels us to be strong One must need strength, otherwise one will never have it.” Goethe’s self-creation, for example, was not a development against or independent of nature but “a return to nature” (*TI* “Expeditions” 49). He did not produce or reinvent his character but instead “affirmed everything which was related to him” and dared “to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness.” His development was an affirmation of nature rather than its redesign, achieved not autonomously but through “a joyful and trusting fatalism . . . the faith that only what is separate and individual may be rejected, that in the totality everything is redeemed and affirmed.”

Consequently, although the higher type is characterized by self-discipline, it does not independently produce that capacity for self-discipline. Freedom is an outcome, a produced character type, not the cause of its own production. Ultimately, human enhancement is not the product of individual but social discipline, not voluntary self-control but “the morality of mores and the social straightjacket” (*GM* II: 2).

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s description of social forms of discipline may still support the objection that breeding actively produces new traits and types, rather than merely promoting naturally occurring traits and types. To produce the “sovereign individual” through the morality of mores is, after all, to “breed [*heranzüchten*] an animal with the right to make promises [*das versprechen darf*]” (*GM* II: 1), to introduce a new type characterized by the unique trait of conscience.

However, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche has not yet introduced the *Twilight of the Idols*’ critical contrast between breeding and taming. The social and moral production of conscience is clearly a morality of taming in the later, pejorative sense, rather than a true morality of breeding. For it does not aim at the production of the sovereign individual or a distinct human

type, but rather at the very opposite: it “makes men to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and consequently calculable” (*GM I*: 1). It seeks, in other words, to make individuals type-less, to breed out the natural qualities that differentiate them, to weaken or eliminate rather than enhance their capacities.

The sovereign individual is, then, an accident of the morality of taming, rather than the intended product of a morality of breeding. More important, the sovereign individual as a higher type is defined in opposition to the taming process that produced it. While the morality of mores (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*) makes individuals “necessary, uniform, like among like [*gleich unter Gleichen*],” the sovereign individual is “like unto himself [*nur sich selbst gleiche*] . . . autonomous and supramoral [*übersittliche*].” In other words, Nietzsche’s morality of breeding is a counter-breeding that turns the disciplinary practices of the morality of taming against its own ends, not in order to introduce new character traits, but in order to breed *out* the traits that taming has introduced.

And since, as we have seen, those traits are negatively defined, anti-natural traits, produced through the repression, weakening, or elimination of natural ones, Nietzschean breeding does not redesign nature but seeks “to translate man back into nature” (*BGE* 230). This “return to nature” is “not really a going-back but a going-up—up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness” (*TI* “Expeditions” 48 and 49), because it does not undo the work of the morality of taming entirely. The morality of breeding preserves its “ripest fruit”: it naturalizes the higher faculty of conscience by freeing it from bad conscience, the domination of conscience by the values of the morality of taming.

Taming, in contrast, is an anti-natural moral method: it does not intend to preserve and enhance desirable powers, but to de-select and exterminate undesirable ones. Taking, again, a literal example: to domesticate a wild animal is to intentionally breed out the traits of size, strength, aggressiveness, and independence. Even if we argue that such traits can be harmful or undesirable, we are not rejecting Nietzsche’s claim that taming disempowers. We are, instead, arguing that disempowerment is sometimes beneficial or justified—a removal of harmful abilities, but abilities nonetheless.

It might also be argued that taming can sometimes empower or produce positive traits—for example, when we breed domesticated dogs for sociability. However, this depends on which trait we are identifying as “sociability.” As a product of taming, sociability is a negative trait, a disempowerment: the absence of aggression. However, as a positive trait—say, friendliness or social intelligence—sociability is the product of breeding

rather than taming. For the breeder does not eliminate the traits of undomesticated dogs: they are already a domesticated species. Instead, the breeder selects and preserves the naturally given trait of sociability that some domesticated dogs possess. To breed a more sociable domesticated dog is, then, not truly an example of taming at all.

The crucial distinction is whether the aim is negative or positive in relation to the trait: whether the goal is to reduce or enhance a characteristic or ability, to preserve or eliminate it. This is why Nietzsche's claim that the morality of taming makes humanity weak or ill is meant quite seriously: "In the struggle with the beast, making it sick can be the only means of making it weak" (*TI* "Improvers" 2).¹⁶ If a morality reduces the power to act, it weakens; and if it weakens to the point of disabling, it can plausibly be likened to an illness. The morality of taming makes sick precisely because it has no other means: as an anti-natural morality it attacks the passions and desires as such, "at their roots," rather than in their excessive manifestation (*TI* "Morality" 1). This means it cannot entirely or truly excise a passion without destroying the patient. Such a morality can practically succeed only by failing to eliminate de-selected abilities entirely, instead reducing the patient's power to act upon its abilities—through disempowering rather than fully disabling.

This brings us to a second, crucial point about the naturalness of breeding. Taming is anti-natural because it de-selects and disempowers rather than selects and empowers. This is, in turn, related to a broader issue in Nietzsche's ethical philosophy—his rejection of strong conceptions of metaphysical free will and, consequently, of forms of morality that rely on the free, voluntary agency of the moral subject to effect change in individual character and action:

When the moralist merely turns to the individual and says to him: "You ought to be thus and thus" he does not cease to make himself ridiculous. The individual is, in his future and in his past, a piece of fate [*ein Stück fatum*], one law more, one necessity more for everything that is and everything that will be. To say to him, "change yourself!" means to demand that everything should change, even in the past. (*TI* "Morality" 6)

It is precisely because Nietzsche does not believe slave morality can be effected on a voluntary level—through a free choice to constrain a condemned passion or instinct—that it is necessary for a natural form of morality to be achieved through breeding: through the cultural production of human types, rather than through rational or moral persuasion.¹⁷

If the individual cannot be substantially changed through moral persuasion, then humanity can only be changed in its future character. But because the present character of the individual cannot be directly changed, future humanity can only be changed through the preservation or extinction of presently existing individuals as types. Breeding “improves” through the selection, preservation, and reproduction of higher individual types. It is a modest, indirect means, because it does not directly change forms of humanity, but selects and preserves natural changes. It does not create types or impose new forms, but chooses the “highest” naturally occurring exemplars and protects them from extinction.

Consequently, breeding is natural, not only as the selection and preservation of natural powers and abilities, but also as an improvement of human types rather than individuals, through the medium of natural necessity rather than volition. Breeding is not vulnerable to Nietzsche’s critique of the “so-called improvers of mankind,” because it affirms the “fatality” of the individual, the impossibility of changing humanity qua individual (*TI* “Improvers” 2, *TI* “Errors” 8).¹⁸

We may conclude, then, that Nietzsche’s critical distinction of moralities of breeding and taming is continuous with that of natural and anti-natural morality. Moreover, these moralities’ positive or negative relation to nature determines their consequences for life as empowering or disempowering, enabling or disabling—generally, as beneficial or harmful to life.

Breeding as Proliferation and Variation, Taming as Reduction and Normalization

Breeding and taming also reflect Nietzsche’s contrast of natural and anti-natural moralities in their relation to natural processes as a whole. As a natural morality that selects and preserves abilities rather than de-selects and disempowers, breeding affirms nature as a whole in its basic characteristic of contingency: as an accidental, purposeless, and endless process of selection, lacking progress in any absolute sense. Breeding tends necessarily toward proliferation, the preservation of new types, as well as toward variation through the preservation of the diversity of types. Taming, in contrast, tends toward reduction, the elimination of negatively evaluated types, and normalization—the universal reproduction of a single moral type in all members of the species, the “last man.”

For Nietzsche, variation and proliferation are processes intrinsic to natural selection and development. Natural processes have no governing aim; their contingency thwarts every attempt to bring human development to

a single, lasting end. The human individual, he says, “is not the subject of an attempt to attain to an ‘ideal of man’ or an ‘ideal of happiness’ or an ‘ideal of morality’—it is absurd to want to hand over his nature to some purpose or other. We invented the concept ‘purpose’: in reality purpose is lacking” (*TI* “Errors” 8). Given this absence of teleological end, nature tends inevitably toward a rich diversity of contradictory, blossoming and perishing, forms and types; it is characterized by a “wealth, luxury, even absurd prodigality” that is indifferent to human evaluations of progress and even tends, on the contrary, toward the “defeat of the stronger, the more privileged, the fortunate exceptions” (*TI* “Expeditions” 14).

This natural condition of contingency, purposelessness, and impermanence does not support moral attempts to transform humanity as a species into a single improved or perfected type: “The entire morality of improvement [*Besserungs-Moral*] . . . has been a misunderstanding” (*TI* “Problem” 11). Indeed, Nietzsche’s self-proclaimed “tragic” form of philosophy is grounded in the affirmation of life’s “sacrifice of its highest types” (*EH* “Books” 3). Any morality that actively seeks to reduce humanity to a single type acts, then, directly against a fundamental limitation of nature: “Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the luxuriance of a prodigal play and change of forms: and does some pitiful journeyman moralist say at the sight of it: ‘No! Man ought to be different?’” (*TI* “Morality” 6).

As with Nietzsche’s fatalism about the individual, this fatalism about the species (“the fatality of all that which has been and will be,” [*TI* “Errors” 8]) is both natural and moral: a recognition of the necessity of lower types and the extinction of higher types, as well as a normative demand to *affirm* this necessity. Consequently, humans cannot be absolutely “improved” (*bessern, verbessern*); they cannot be changed universally or permanently, nor can they be fundamentally “bettered”: made qualitatively better or worse. Instead, we must understand human enhancement both relatively and quantitatively.

First, the relative enhancement of humanity as a whole is determined according to the production of higher types within that whole, rather than the universalization of a single type. “Enhancement” in the sense of “raising” or “heightening” (*Erhöhung*) (*BGE* 44, 239, 257) improves one individual or type relative to the norm of the species, so there cannot be absolute enhancement of the species as a whole.

Instead, breeding seeks to produce and preserve higher types among other types, to add to or preserve nature’s “enchanting wealth of types” rather than transform all human beings into one higher type.¹⁹ Consequently, enhancement is primarily a matter of quantitative, not qualitative, change: “enhancement” as “expansion,” “increase,” or “greatness” (*Vergrößerung*,

Grösse) (*BGE* 212)—as “making more” (more diverse and stronger drives and abilities) rather than “making good” (morally or aesthetically better drives and abilities).

Second, the improvement of types within the whole is relative to contingent historical conditions. If there are no purposes in nature, there are no absolute criteria according to which we can measure the well-being or excellence of higher types. Consider, as an analogy, the process of natural selection. The “fitness” or well-adaptedness of a species is determinable only relative to the conditions of its environment, since attributes beneficial under one set of environmental conditions might be harmful under others. Consequently, a species is “better” or “worse” adapted only relative to its current environmental state. Individual traits do not have adaptive value for every species or individual in a species, and even within the same species a trait’s value varies with its changing environmental conditions.²⁰

Likewise, because human well-being depends upon a changeable human type’s relation to contingent historical circumstances, whether or not a human type is “well turned out” (*wohlgerathen*) cannot be evaluated absolutely, but only in relation to the actual historical conditions in which it exists.²¹ Therefore, there cannot be a single vision of moral improvement for all human beings that would serve as the criterion of moral breeding: what is an enhancement of life for a given individual or group in contemporary historical circumstances may tomorrow be harmful. Consequently, human well-being, like evolutionary fitness, is best served not by direct improvement but by diversity. The greater the diversity of types, the greater the likelihood that any one will be well suited to its conditions of existence.²²

Breeding, then, does not conceive and create a specific higher type. It is designed to take advantage of fortunate exceptions rather than engineer them. It is an experiment rather than an art, one that (1) produces the conditions for the proliferation of all types, not just the higher, and (2) selects from and preserves accidentally produced higher types. So, we may conclude that, on Nietzsche’s view, human improvement is best served through the proliferation of human types, rather than through the defining and engineering of an “overman” as ideal type—a method which would repeat the same error of selective narrowing that Nietzsche condemns in the “last man” ideal of moral taming (*Z* “Prologue” 5).²³

Nietzsche repeatedly suggests this connection between variation and human improvement. On the level of the individual, he tells us that “the greatness of man” lies in “being capable of being as manifold as whole, as ample as full” (*BGE* 212). The same is true of the conditions for human

development: humanity is made great precisely by maintaining its unity while diversifying the types within it, increasing its manifoldness. Historical epochs in which a diversity of human values, types, and ways of life flourish promote overall “variation, whether as deviation (to something higher, subtler, rarer) or as degeneration and monstrosity” (*BGE* 262). In such epochs, “the individual dares to be individual and different,” in turn creating “a splendid, manifold, junglelike growth and upward striving, a kind of tropical tempo in the competition to grow” (*BGE* 262). To be sure, this manifoldness is the condition of harmful variations as well as beneficial ones, but Nietzsche’s point is precisely that it is the condition for both.

From Nietzsche’s naturalistic fatalism, it follows that the morality of taming, in contrast, is anti-natural in two ways. First, because the well-being of humanity is relative to contingent historical circumstances, the morality of taming is opposed to the natural conditions that maximize effective breeding. Second, by prescribing a single moral ideal for all humanity, it pits itself against a natural world that tends, intrinsically, toward the proliferation rather than perfection of types.²⁴ Its ideal is anti-natural in the dangerous sense that it can succeed only through the active destruction of naturally proliferating variations from that ideal. If everyone cannot be tamed, if every individual cannot be transformed into the “last man,” then the last man can be realized only through the elimination of every other type.

Breeding as Preservation of Types, Taming as Destruction through Anti-Types

The final way that breeding and taming reflect Nietzsche’s distinction of natural and anti-natural moralities is in their relation to natural change—specifically, in the destructiveness of their methods of preserving selected types against non-selected types. Unlike taming, breeding does not actively eliminate non-selected types. It is “selective” in the truest sense: it refuses to de-select. In keeping with Nietzsche’s commitment to the affirmation of the whole of existence, the love of fate (*amor fati*), breeding does not engage in authentic destruction. It only selects against anti-types—false types defined by the absence of traits. It destroys only ideals and practices that produce such anti-types through actively disabling; it affirms, in contrast, all variations of authentic types within the diversity of the species.

We have already seen that the selective character of breeding tends toward an increased diversity of types. But *amor fati* is not merely a refusal

to actively condemn non-selected types, but an active affirmation (*Jasagen*) of their existence as part of the whole sphere of life: “We immoralists have . . . opened wide our hearts to every kind of understanding, comprehension, approval. We do not readily deny, we seek our honor in affirming” (*TI* “Morality” 6). Unconditional affirmation is a part of Nietzsche’s strategy of spiritualizing rather than exterminating passions: enmity is transformed through recognition of “the value of having enemies” (*TI* “Morality” 3).

This is not abstract generosity on Nietzsche’s part; he expressly affirms the continued existence of the church and Judeo-Christian morality as enduring philosophical enemies. “We immoralists and anti-Christians see that it is to our advantage that the Church exists.” In a later section he adds:

We have come more and more to appreciate that economy which needs and knows how to use all that which the holy lunacy of the priest, the diseased reason of the priest rejects; that economy in the law of life which derives advantage even from the repellent species of the bigot, the priest, the virtuous man. (*TI* “Morality” 6)

Nietzsche repeatedly insists he can simultaneously affirm and condemn, that he can select or promote without de-selecting or eliminating: “I do not want to wage war against what is ugly . . . Looking away shall be my only negation!” (*GS* 276). We can conclude, then, that he does not intend the same “destruction of enemies” that he criticizes Christianity for, that a morality of breeding produces higher human types alongside others rather than through their exclusion. In some way, his morality preserves the very ideals and types it condemns.²⁵

Can Nietzsche’s morality promote higher types without making war against the lower? Of course, no morality, breeding included, can *fully* affirm what it morally condemns. It is not in a merely exaggerated way that Nietzsche repeatedly and explicitly appeals, despite his love of fate, to “destruction” (*Vernichtung*) as a necessary moral means. However, can we interpret Nietzsche’s endorsement of destruction in a way consistent with affirmation?²⁶

Nietzsche often uses the language of warfare and violence figuratively, but there are instances in which he appears to condone actual harm. For example, in one deeply troubling passage, he says that the “higher breeding [*Höherzüchtung*] of humanity” calls for “the remorseless destruction [*scho-nungslose Vernichtung*] of all degeneracies and parasites [*Entartenden und Parasitischen*]” (*EH* “The Birth of Tragedy” 4). In another, he complains that Christianity preserves “what ought to perish” (*BGE* 62).

We should first note that Nietzsche uses *Vernichtung* for “destruction,” which he has already identified with anti-natural morality’s extermination of the passions. So we should be wary of attributing a meaning to this positive use of *Vernichtung* in *Ecce Homo* that would directly contradict his critical use of the term in *Twilight of the Idols* (TI “Morality” 1), a work completed the same year.

More important, such comments, although literally intended, are misleading in their reference in two ways. First, they do not refer to the destruction of types as collections of human individuals, but types as such. It is not the perishing of beings but forms of character, not persons but forms of life.²⁷ Second, they refer not to the destruction of authentic, positively determined types, but rather to the destruction of “anti-types” which, I will argue, does not involve authentic destruction at all.²⁸

Although Nietzsche’s morality of cultivation allows unselected types to perish, it is essential to remember that this is a *morality* of breeding: a sociocultural selection and preservation of psychological types. Likewise, the de-selection of types is also sociocultural process: an undoing of the values and habits that produce and reproduce the deselected type. Consequently, the destruction of character types does not entail the destruction of persons possessing those characters.²⁹

For example, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche suggests we can reverse the development of bad conscience (the principal harmful effect of moral taming) through a transvaluation of values, an evaluative fusing of the feeling of guilt to unnatural rather than natural instincts (*GM* II: 24). This is the paradigmatic case of Nietzschean “destruction,” the refusal to preserve what “ought to perish”: he is calling for the destruction of the guilt-ridden personality, the elimination of bad conscience as a form of human life.

The priest, in contrast, responds to the suffering of the guilty by preserving their type. By offering temporary relief in the form of forgiveness and penance, by continuing to interpret suffering as moral punishment for sin, the priest preserves not individual lives, but guilty conscience as a form of personality. Nietzsche’s reinterpretation of suffering as the innocence of becoming is an attempt to destroy this form of life: to end the continued production of guilty character by destroying the interpretation of suffering that regenerates it.

This is an exemplary case of “philosophizing with a hammer”: a philosophical interpretation that destroys a form of character production, thus ultimately destroying an entire human type: guilty conscience. This interpretation of the metaphor of the hammer best captures both of its intended connotations, the martial imagery of destruction and the gentler image in

the forward to *Twilight of the Idols*: the tuning fork used to “sound out” hollow idols, destroying not realities but falsehoods, not beings but values, practices, and personality types that negate reality. In the latter respect, *vernichten* suggests not annihilation, but rather a revealing or releasing of the nothingness of which such “ideals” are constituted: “The characteristics which have been given to the ‘true being’ of things are the characteristics of non-being, of nothingness; the ‘true world’ has been constructed from the contradiction of the actual world” (*TI* “Reason” 6).

This is not merely one possible, minor example of innocuous “destruction”; it is the principal kind with which Nietzsche is concerned. For moral guilt is the fundamental harm that the taming has inflicted upon humanity, the fundamental obstacle to the survival of higher types and, therefore, the principle cause of humanity’s decline. Christian morality has “waged a war to the death” against higher types (*A* 5). It has attempted to “break the strong, sickly over great hopes, cast suspicion on the joy in beauty, bend everything haughty, manly, conquering, domineering, all the instincts characteristic of the highest and best-turned-out type of ‘man,’ into unsureness, agony of conscience, self-destruction” (*BGE* 62).

Consequently, to destroy guilt as a form of character is to attack decline at the very root. Nietzsche’s provocative endorsement of destruction means, not that we should harm or let perish those who suffer, but that we should cease harming those who do *not* suffer. What ought to perish is the systematic reproduction of a destructive form of personality—*not* the victim of this form of personality. We should, then, understand Nietzsche’s call for the destruction of types as a call to cease their intentional production and reproduction.³⁰

This is not, however, a claim that his language of destruction is metaphorical. It is literally destruction in two senses. First, it is a destruction of types and, second, to cease reproducing these types requires the destruction of the ideals, values, and practices that condition them.

It should be added that the destruction of types and values rather than persons is not accidentally beneficial, a fortunate side effect of Nietzsche’s preoccupation with types over individuals. The effects of breeding are intentionally beneficial to the deselected, since breeding is designed to negate only negative qualities. It follows from breeding’s selective character that it can only select against false types: negatively defined forms of character based in values and practices that actively disempower, disable, and exterminate true types.

As we have seen, moral taming is a form of de-selection: it produces types characterized by the absence of negatively evaluated traits. They are not authentic character types, but non-types defined by negative attributes,

by a lack or weakness of traits—for example, charity as unselfishness, humility as lack of pride, or purity as lack of sensuality. Consequently, Nietzsche’s irresponsible language of “degeneracies and parasites” is consistent with his commitment to *amor fati*, because it refers to these negative forms of personality. They are literally degenerate (*Entartet*) because they eliminate formal traits: they are anti-forms, anti-kinds (*Entarten*) rather than kinds (*Arten*), existing parasitically upon the traits and types they weaken or destroy.

Thus, taming does not produce competing types at all: it systematically destroys all competitors. It is intrinsically destructive, a “common war on all that is strange, privileged, the higher man” (*BGE* 212). And, consequently, breeding does not authentically destroy at all, but instead conducts, as the saying goes, “a war on war.” The destruction of anti-types does not remove form but preserves it, destroying what are in the strongest sense “ideals” (anti-traits and anti-types) rather than realities, a destruction that is accomplished simply through the *preservation* of positively determined forms of character.³¹

In this way, breeding indirectly preserves all true types, including non-selected ones, by destroying the values and practices that undermine them, and by protecting the existence of character as such from the truly destructive morality of taming, which seeks the eradication of all character through the universal realization of a negatively-defined moral ideal.

Comparative Eugenics as a Morality of Taming: A Nietzschean Critique

We are now in a position to conclude that all comparative forms of eugenics are instances of the morality of taming, that they share in its dangerous tendency toward destructiveness, and that they are diametrically opposed to Nietzsche’s morality of breeding. By comparative eugenics, I mean the promotion or elimination of traits based in comparative values, such as evaluations of superiority and inferiority or type, trait, or ability.³² I will begin with the most extreme case: historical forms of racial eugenics that have led to racism, discrimination, oppression, and genocide. I will then close with a discussion of contemporary liberal eugenics and so-called designer baby cases.

The principal characteristic of racial eugenics is its foundation in what Nietzsche calls the slavish mode of evaluation: its concept of the good, the health of the race, is comparatively defined in relation to a more primary negative evaluation, the identification of one or more out-group as inferior. This negative foundation grounds the primary, supposedly positive, concept

of “purity.” The good is equivalent to the elimination of evil: racial superiority is defined by what it excludes rather than what it includes, by the absence of traits rather than their presence.

As in the morality of taming, racial eugenics produces a moral ideal that rejects competing types. Because the ideal is both universal (claiming superiority as species) and negative (defined as exclusion of an out-group), it cannot exist alongside competing types. Like the negative anti-types of taming, a racial eugenic ideal is realized precisely through the direct negation of competing types, and so it tends necessarily toward domination and violence. Consequently, racial eugenics is clearly an instance of the morality of taming. Indeed, any eugenic theory whose conception of superiority is universal and grounded in direct negation must be a morality of taming. The distance between Nietzsche’s morality of breeding from ethically dangerous historical forms of eugenics is, then, not simply substantial, but absolute: they are related only in their direct opposition.

Finally, we can conclude that contemporary liberal or non-coercive varieties of comparative eugenics also fall into the category of taming for the same reason: their positivity is an illusion; they do not select for true traits, but against them. This is also their ethical failure: they do not truly benefit the selected, but rather harm the de-selected.

I will focus on what I will call perfectionist eugenics, in which parents use direct genetic intervention to enhance their child’s abilities (sometimes referred to as “designer baby” cases). The principal ethical worry is that these parents’ children will have an unjust advantage over others. Now, I have emphasized that Nietzsche’s morality of breeding affirms ability, power, and difference. Surely, we might argue, this includes the affirmation of *superior* ability. Must we conclude that Nietzsche would endorse perfectionist eugenics as a morality of breeding?

On the contrary, it is a morality of taming, for it does not involve the selection of positive abilities, but rather the de-selection of comparative disadvantages, falsely perceived as disabilities. Since we are concerned only about cases where fairness or justice is endangered, I will limit the argument to cases involving the introduction of abilities significantly superior to the norm; for example, superior intelligence, talent, or beauty.

Perfectionist eugenics selects abilities for their relative value: *comparative* abilities.³³ For example, suppose it one day becomes technologically possible to eugenically enhance intelligence. Parents choosing such a procedure would not wish merely to make their children intellectually able, but to give them an educational advantage—to make them more able than other children. But a comparative ability like greater intelligence is not an ability different in kind from that of intelligence; it is one and the same

ability, evaluated relationally. So, parents who genetically select for intelligence are not really selecting *for* intelligence, but *against* average or inferior intelligence, perceived as disability.

Moreover, this de-selection is of a disadvantage rather than an authentic disability: inferior intelligence is only comparatively negative. In itself, it is a positive ability. The parents are not really de-selecting average or inferior intelligence in their own child, but instead indirectly de-selecting intellectual equality or superiority in other children. The target of their genetic intervention is not their child's intelligence, but the social norm against which their child will be measured. While they claim to select for a positive ability in their own child, they are instead manipulating the norm in order to produce a negative, relative disability in other children.

The illusion that perfectionist eugenics positively promotes authentic abilities has its basis in the very same inversion of good and bad, being and non-being, ideal and reality, that Nietzsche attributes to slave morality in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. While the nobles affirm their own positively existing traits as good, the slaves negate the positive traits of the nobles, affirming their destruction as good.

Likewise, while the ability of intelligence is a positive trait, perfectionist eugenicists identify its possession by others as a harmful disadvantage to their own child, thus identifying the relative reduction of other children's intelligence as a good. While claiming to positively improve the populace by improving intelligence, perfectionist eugenicists instead manipulate comparative intelligence in a way that weakens the relative intelligence of others. They disguise a negative evaluation of the child's intelligence as a positive one, and a reduction of other children's relative abilities as an absolute promotion of ability.

Consequently, perfectionist eugenics is a morality of taming, characterized by de-selection rather than selection, disempowerment rather than empowerment, the reduction and normalization of types rather than their variation and proliferation, and active harm to the de-selected, rather than the protection of differentiated types. We may conclude that Nietzsche's morality of breeding is utterly opposed to every form of eugenics that selects for comparatively defined identities, traits, or abilities. Far from being compatible with ethically dangerous forms of eugenics, it provides us with a decisive critical basis for their rejection.