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## Nietzsche and Value: Flourishing and Excellence<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche displays a deep and pervasive interest in a theme central to ethical enquiry: what a *good life* involves. His concern, ultimately, is not a *merely good* life, but *excellence*. Indeed, he advances a form of *perfectionism*: an ideal valorising above all else the highest human excellences. That much should be uncontroversial. More contentiously, I'll suggest that his perfectionism combines two ideals from two different perfectionist traditions. One focuses on *flourishing*: how well a person is configured internally and how well she fares in relation to her environment. The other focuses on *external excellences*: achievements embodying something great or excellent in their own right, beyond or external to flourishing—we might think here of artistic, intellectual or cultural achievements, to take Nietzsche's stock examples. Both are excellences. For clarity, though, and for want of better labels, I'll hereon use 'excellence' to denote only external excellences distinct from flourishing.

Why is this significant? At an interpretative level, distinguishing these two goods is important for making adequate sense of Nietzsche's ethics. The greatest human exemplars—'higher types', as he often calls them—flourish *and* excel. Yet nobody as far as I know has yet explained how exactly these differ or indeed connect. Many commentators focus on just one or the other, or else slip uncomfortably between the two. Doing so generates some serious interpretative and theoretical difficulties. One of my aims, then, is to clarify what Nietzschean flourishing and excellence involve, including how they differ and connect, and to develop an axiological picture that makes sense of this. My additional hope is that the underlying model of value which emerges—in effect, a model of a good life—is interesting and attractive in its own right, and that it may therefore have wider philosophical appeal.

The discussion is organised as follows. §1 makes three brief points about the paper's approach. §§2–4 examine flourishing: its basic components, how these fit together, and its value. §§5–6 turn to excellence and its value. §7 concludes with some brief remarks on the account's wider appeal.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an abbreviated version of materials developed more fully in Part III of Robertson forthcoming, (especially Ch.10). There I also anticipate and respond to a range of interpretative and theoretical qualms. I note some of these as we go along but lack space to address them all fully here. I've presented materials directly related to this version of the paper at the *Practical Agency and Values* Workshop (University of Warwick, 2013), the *Post-Kantian Perfectionism* Conference (University of Sheffield, 2014), and the *Nietzsche and Morals* Conference (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte and Ouro Preto, 2014). Many thanks to their organisers and to the audiences for useful discussions—especially Ulrike Heuer, David James, Jan Kandiyali, Rogério Lopes, Alexander Nehamas, Peter Poellner, Bernard Reginster, Leonardo Ribeiro, John Richardson, John Skorupski, Dariush Sokolov, and Christoph Suringa.

### 1. Three preliminaries

First, my focus here is *value*: that realm of thought centring around claims articulable via valoric concepts like *good*, *bad*, *better* and *worse*. I'm treating the evaluative sphere as distinct from that aspect of the normative domain focused on what people *ought* and have *reason* to do. In particular, claims of the form 'A's  $\phi$ ing would be good' do not uniformly entail claims of the form 'there is a reason for A to  $\phi$ '.<sup>2</sup> This is important for Nietzsche in several respects. I'll here mention one. Suppose that, were A to  $\phi$ , A would realize an end *E* embodying some highly valuable excellence, but that A is irredeemably mediocre and utterly incapable of  $\phi$ ing or realizing *E*. In that case, there may be no reason for A to  $\phi$  or pursue *E*. Whereas true practical 'ought' and 'reason' claims imply 'can', the same need not hold for true evaluative claims.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the model advanced inevitably involves some *reconstruction*. The basic ingredients informing it are supported by textual evidence and each has an established interpretative pedigree; the main reconstructive work involves fitting these ingredients together. This involves marshalling a combination of textual and philosophical considerations: drawing distinctions perhaps only implicit in Nietzsche's own writings and developing a workable axiological picture. A virtue of the resulting account is that it reconciles what could otherwise appear to be conflicting strands in Nietzsche's thought.

Third, as noted, central to the model are two fundamental goods, not always clearly distinguished: *flourishing* and *excellence*. I'll explicate these partly in terms of the ways they are exemplified by 'higher types'. Such types play two roles. On the one hand, they are the rare few who achieve full-blown greatness, by flourishing *and* realizing external excellence. This is a constitutive thesis about what it is to be a fully-fledged higher type. I appeal to such types to unpack Nietzsche's perfectionist ideal. On the other hand, I'm also deploying them as a rhetorical device: to elucidate more general features of the structure and content of a good life—features which, I hope, combine to yield a model that may be appealing even for those wishing to resist the more highfalutin excesses of Nietzsche's own views.

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<sup>2</sup> Where 'A' stands for an agent and ' $\phi$ ' is a verb participle denoting an action token.

<sup>3</sup> I examine Nietzsche's conception of normativity in Robertson 2011. I don't mean to siphon off the normative and evaluative domains completely, though; I show how they connect in Robertson forthcoming (Ch.11).

## 2. Flourishing: substantive ingredients

There are several German words aptly translated ‘flourishing’, including ‘*Gedeihen*’ and ‘*Aufblühen*’. Nietzsche uses these terms relatively sparingly in his published works.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, much of what he writes about *health* [*Gesundheit*]*—*whether pertaining to humans as individuals or species, and whether located at a psychological, physiological or social level*—*accords with what we may more ordinarily think of as *flourishing*. Here I focus on individuals. Flourishing and health are also inextricably bound up with Nietzsche’s enigmatic dictum to *become what one is* (*GS* 270, 335).<sup>5</sup> Such ‘self-becoming’ is an *ongoing process* that requires *actively realizing your highest potential*. You are in a process of flourishing only when your activities promote your (highest) potential; and you may achieve a state of flourishing by realizing that potential. Nonetheless flourishing, qua process or state, is not permanent once achieved. It can grow or deteriorate depending on what you do and it comes in degrees: the degree to which you flourish, both at a time and across your life, depends on (*inter alia*) the extent to which you realize your potential.

Nietzsche emphasises two general sets of conditions a flourishing human agent satisfies: what we could call *psychological efficacy* and being an *effective agent*.<sup>6</sup> These are intertwined: flourishing involves a suitable mesh between your psychological makeup and what you do. To further clarify I’ll sketch four more specific elements.

Firstly, becoming what you are by realizing your highest potential involves *self-understanding* (see Nietzsche’s exaltations to ‘know yourself’, e.g. *GS* 335; *BGE* 39; *A* 50; *EH* IV 7). Your potential, or what you can make of yourself and hence become, is in various ways shaped and constrained by who you already are. So, to understand what you can become you need to understand who you already are. For Nietzsche, what makes you the particular person you are depends significantly on psychological facts about you—including your cognitive and affective capacities, abilities, limitations and propensities. Central to this range are what we can call your ‘motives’: any psychological item that does or could motivate you. Nietzsche distinguishes a variety of such motives: drives, affects and instincts, but also desires, passions, feelings, tastes, evaluative commitments, and more. (As well as motivating us directly,

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<sup>4</sup> Salient passages include *WB* 11; *GS* 1, 347; *GM* P3, II 10, II 12, III 11, III 19; *EH* F2, IV 7.

<sup>5</sup> *GM* and *EH* are particularly rife with talk of *health*, with *EH*’s subtitle ‘How To Become What You Are’ suggesting a non-coincidental connection between health and self-becoming. The idea of flourishing is common enough in secondary literature; see e.g. Leiter 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Psychological conditions are emphasised by e.g. Gemes 2009; Janaway 2012; effective agency by e.g. Clark 2001; Reginster 2007; Owen 2007; Ridley 2009.

motives often play various background roles; they together produce general dispositions of character and evaluation, thus shaping the kinds of persons we are and the kinds of things we are motivated to do.) So, part of what constitutes a person, as the particular individual she is, is her motives and how these are configured, i.e. their ‘order of rank’ and the hierarchical relations between them (*BGE* 219, 268). Self-understanding therefore involves understanding the particularities of who one is, as embodied in (*inter alia*) one’s motives.<sup>7</sup> This can be a demanding task. Many of our motives operate at non-conscious levels, giving rise to a complex interaction of motivational forces competing to express themselves, including by inhibiting and sabotaging one another in ways not immediately transparent to us (see *D* 119, 129; *BGE* 200; *TI* ‘Skirmishes’ 49; *WP* 966). Self-understanding therefore requires uncompromisingly honest self-scrutiny (*GS* 335; *BGE* 39; *A* 50; *EH* IV 7): veridical assessment of the kind of person one is—‘surveying all the strengths and weakness of [one’s] nature’ (*GS* 290; cf. *GS* 335)—including the interplay of motives that make one who one is.

The second component is ‘self-mastery’. This involves ordering and directing one’s motives into a coherent whole—having ‘one’s pros and contra *in one’s power*’ and imposing a ‘*rank ordering*’ onto them (*HH* P6; *GM* III 12).<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche thinks that at least some individuals are constituted by a multiplicity of diverse and conflicting motives. Someone who is, if he is to flourish, must master and order them into a more or less cohesive whole—lest they leave him a psychologically *dis*-integrated mess (*BGE* 200; *TI* ‘Expeditions’ 49; *EHI* 4; *WP* 966). There are several ways one might achieve such unity and self-mastery (see *D* 109; *BGE* 200). Nietzsche supposes that unity comes about when one’s motives are structured hierarchically under a governing set of drives. But those figures he extols, rather than extirpating or directly mollifying motives recalcitrant to that governing set, *sublimates* them. They become redirected without being weakened, their energy harnessed into a unified whole that inherits their combined strength (*BGE* 200; *TI* ‘Expeditions’ 49). The stronger the combination of one’s drives, the more vehemently they need to be expressed through action and the more likely they are to be so expressed. Thus, the activities of such a person overflow from a ‘feeling of plenitude’ and ‘superfluity of power’ (*BGE* 260). Nietzsche’s

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<sup>7</sup> For further detail on motives and their roles in Nietzsche’s thought, see Robertson 2011 and forthcoming (Ch.8). Leiter (2002: 101-4) reads Nietzsche as claiming that we can never know (or by implication understand) our motives. A different concern about the role I’ve given to self-understanding draws upon Nietzsche’s suggestion at *EH* II 9 that ‘Becoming what you are presupposes that you have not the slightest inkling *what* you are’. I address both interpretative points in Robertson forthcoming (Ch.10).

<sup>8</sup> For extended discussion, see Anderson 2012; Janaway 2012.

ideal, then, is one of increased psychic energy attained through unity-in-diversity; this better conduces to activity.

Self-understanding and self-mastery are not sufficient for Nietzschean flourishing, but facilitate two further elements. The third involves *setting yourself goals* the pursuit and realization of which would *express who you are*. Flourishing involves *activity*, i.e. doing things; but it also requires doing things that *express who you are*. And that requires setting goals which enables this. We can usefully tease out two further subsidiary components. Firstly, Nietzsche emphasises the importance of determining *your own* goals (and *for yourself*); secondly, you've got to set yourselves *appropriate* goals. (These represent ideals of *autonomy* and *authenticity*.) The goals you *do* set yourself will be shaped and constrained by your existing motives; and whatever you do will in one way or another reflect your antecedent motivational setup.<sup>9</sup> But there can be more and less appropriate (or better and worse) ways for you to express yourself, given who you are. Nietzsche sometimes implies that, to set yourself appropriate goals that will enable you to best express who you are, you've got to understand who you are (hence the importance he gives to self-understanding). In that case, your goals must reflect veridical awareness of who you already are *and* a realistic appraisal of your future potential: realistic in that your assessment of what counts as a genuine practical possibility must be sensitive to facts about the kind of person you already are, including your motives and abilities, since those facts shape and constrain the potentialities you could actualize and hence what you are able to make of yourself or become. What, though, explains why ordering and directing your motives one way would be *more appropriate* than another?—why, prioritise the expression of *these* particular motives and direct your activities towards *these* goals rather than others? In short, the motives and goals to prioritise are those that better allow you to express yourself as an agent. More informatively, acting in light of some motives and goals will be more conducive to long-term *sustained activity* that you find meaningful because it *fulfils* you.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, if you have a deep-rooted creative drive, say, it will typically be conducive to your flourishing to set yourself goals enabling you to express yourself creatively, because expressing yourself through creative activities you care about will feel meaningful and be more likely to fulfil you. On the other hand, it will be more conducive to your

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<sup>9</sup> See Robertson 2011: 597–9 and forthcoming (Ch.8), also Katsafanas 2013: ch.5.

<sup>10</sup> Given these two variables—*sustained* activity that is *fulfilling*—the appropriateness of the goals you set yourself is not reduced to a (neo-Humean) function of the strength or dominance of some motives over others.

flourishing (and hence more appropriate) to set yourself goals which facilitate ongoing activity—longer-term projects that enable you to continue expressing yourself in fulfilling ways, rather than short or merely episodic fixes. Thus ‘A great man’, Nietzsche writes, has ‘a long logic in all his activity... he has the ability to extend his will across great stretches of his life’ (*KSÄ* 11: 34[96] / *WP* 962).

Fourth, you must actually *realize* the goals you appropriately set yourself. Part of Nietzsche’s thought is that motives, qua dispositions to act, are like bundles of psychic energy seeking expression through action (*GM* II). The longer they go unexpressed, the more vehement they become; if you are unable to express them at all, the more frustrated you become (the Nietzschean explanation being that we are action-oriented creatures partly comprised by drives that need expressing somehow—as put to dramatic effect in *GM* I’s account of the slave revolt in morals). Thus, by expressing your motives through action you satisfy an important part of *what* you are: an action-oriented agent. Moreover, though, by realizing the goals it is appropriate for you to realize, you not only discharge motives that need expressing somehow, but express the motives constitutive of *who* you are and thereby *express yourself*. For we want not only to act, but to do specific things—to realize particular goals, to overcome the challenges we set ourselves, and so forth. (Again, when unable to engage in these activities, or when locked in projects that do not fulfil us or do not express who we are, we typically feel deeply frustrated, even if not in ways immediately transparent to us.) We have a deep psychological need to be effective not only in what we actually do but in expressing who we are. For Nietzsche, it is by setting and realizing your own goals—goals that express who you are—that you ‘create *yourself*’ and realize your potential to ‘become what *you* are’ (or could be). As he puts it in the context of free spirited higher types, such people ‘*want to become those [they] are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves’ (*GS* 335).

The four ingredients, then, together contribute to a view of a flourishing person as a *self-governing, authentic* and *effective agent*: someone masters herself and determines her own ends, and who by realizing those ends through effective agency expresses who she is in ways that fulfil her.<sup>11</sup> For ease of reference I’ll summarise the account so far by saying that Nietzschean flourishing involves:

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<sup>11</sup> I’ve presented the four ingredients separately, as if the first three (self-understanding, self-mastery and setting your own goals) were preconditions for effective self-expressing agency. However, they can interact organically and dynamically. For instance, directing your actions in a unified way could be a way to achieve self-mastery and self-

- (1) achieving a high degree of psychological unity and efficacy (via self-understanding, self-mastery and setting your own goals in a self-governing or autonomous way), and
- (2) expressing yourself externally through your agency (realizing your potential to become what you could be by realizing the goals it is appropriate to set yourself).

This account fits nicely with independently attractive views about what a good or flourishing typically involves: psychological integration (e.g. psychological unity born of self-understanding and self-mastery); autonomy (i.e. self-mastery and self-governance manifested and achieved through determining and pursuing your own ends); being an effective agent who achieves the goals you set yourself; self-expression or authenticity (expressing important parts of who you are) achieved through engaging in activities you find meaningful and that fulfil you; and sustaining that activity across your life. Before turning to the value of flourishing, we need to consider how (1) and (2) connect structurally.

### 3. Flourishing: structural issues

As a first point, given Nietzsche's emphasis on our being action-oriented creatures, we could safely treat (2) as a necessary condition for flourishing. Indeed, it is difficult to see how you could flourish if you systematically fail to realize goals it is appropriate for you to realize given who you are and thereby fail to express yourself as an activity-oriented agent. Insofar as the various conditions going into (1) are necessary for (2), they too could be seen as necessary. It is again difficult to see how you could flourish unless you possess or achieve at least some modicum of psychological unity and efficacy. There is room for disagreement here. However, I'll hereon just assume that satisfying the conditions going into (1), or at least satisfying some cluster of them to whatever degree is necessary to deliver (2), is also necessary. So I'll assume that (1) and (2) are necessary components of Nietzschean flourishing.

Second, and to now elaborate on a point already implicit, you may flourish to a greater or lesser *degree*. You can be psychologically unified to a greater or lesser extent. You may set yourself goals which, if realized, express your deepest motives more or less fully, or express motives more or less integral to who you really are. You may realize these goals to greater or lesser extents. And you may flourish to greater and lesser degrees at different periods of your life. There's unlikely to be a *sharp* cut-off point above which

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understanding: a way to become a unified agent and to clarify who you really are through what you do (see Pippin 2010: ch.4; Ridley 2009).



you definitely count as flourishing and below which you do not. Nevertheless, there are numerous ways you can fail to flourish. You might lack a requisite degree of psychological unity or efficacy. You might select inappropriate goals (goals you end up finding deeply unsatisfying, say). Or you might completely fail to realize the goals you do set yourself. Any such failure could be due to something about you (your inabilities or ill-discipline, say) or extrinsic factors (including plain bad luck). And some people may *never* find themselves in the conditions they need to flourish—if, say, their social context completely thwarts them from realizing the goals they need to realize to express who they are.

Third, this is a *partly substantive* account of flourishing. It specifies a range of substantive conditions or goods: self-understanding, psychological integration, autonomy, effective agency, self-expression, etc. But it is also partly formal: it does not specify any *particular* motives or goals a person needs to have or realize in order to flourish. Its multiple realizability thereby licenses significant variation in how different people flourish, depending on the contents of their motives and goals.

Fourth, we should consider whether meeting (1) and (2) is sufficient for Nietzschean flourishing. For that to be plausible, we may need to add a caveat to the effect that you realize your goals in the *right kinds of ways*: through competence rather than utter fluke, perhaps, that your activities are non-coincidentally related to the goals you set yourself, and so on. But assuming that the right connections are in place,<sup>12</sup> are (1) and (2) jointly sufficient for flourishing to at least some degree?

Nietzsche may have had inconsistent views on this. On the one hand, he sometimes speaks of individuals and types who are ‘sick’ or ‘unhealthy’, and suggests that a ‘prerequisite’ for achieving an actual state of health is ‘*that one is basically healthy*’ (EH I 2), i.e. that one has an underlying healthy disposition or capacity. Taking the metaphor of a healthy person to indicate a flourishing person, this may suggest that people who do not have a basic capacity to be healthy are unable to flourish. And Nietzsche does (sometimes) seem to think there are such people—‘priestly types’ perhaps one key example. So, assuming (for now) that such priestly types could satisfy (1) and (2), they nonetheless fail to flourish. On the other hand, however, he also seems to allow that different types of people can flourish in different ways, *relative to the type they are*. He claims that ‘All animals [...] strive instinctively for an optimum combination of favourable conditions which allow them to extend their energy and achieve their

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<sup>12</sup> I won’t keep repeating this caveat but it can be assumed throughout.

maximum feeling of power' (*GM III 7*). And central to his critique of morality is the thought that people are often pretty effective at securing such conditions. Indeed, priestly types can be extremely effective at achieving the (feeling of) power they crave, by governing the herd through the religious and moral institutions they propagate.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, complying with morality serves the interests, needs and instincts of the herdlike mediocre majority (*BGE 198, 201, 202; GM I, III; WP 287*). Likewise, monstrous types might flourish by being monstrous<sup>14</sup> and higher types might flourish by excelling. In which case, on the assumption that securing the conditions one needs in order to satisfy and sustain one's own interests (needs, drives for power, etc.) is generally conducive to flourishing as the type one is, individuals can flourish relative to the type they are. This would allow that (1) and (2) are sufficient after all.

Given these apparent tensions, we may just need to attribute to Nietzsche one view or the other.<sup>15</sup> I'll briefly consider two possible grounds for denying that (1) and (2) are sufficient; but I'll argue that these are inconclusive and then provide two reasons to accept they are sufficient.

A first ground for doubt is illustrated by the following example. Suppose an artist ahead of her time masters her motives and expresses who she is by producing incredible paintings, thereby satisfying (1) and (2). But her artworld peers mock, disdain or ignore her efforts; so although she continues to produce fabulous art, she never receives the recognition she seeks. On the sufficiency model, she nonetheless flourishes (at least to some degree). On the insufficiency view, given the artistic-social context she finds herself in she fails (and may be unable) to flourish. In this scenario, I suspect Nietzsche would go for the result implied by the sufficiency model. For he accepts that people can flourish even though (and partly because) they defy and overcome external (e.g. social) resistances to the projects through which they realize their potential. Indeed, this is the predicament of many free spirited higher types—

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<sup>13</sup> Thus, although Nietzsche sometimes describes priests as the 'most powerless' people (e.g. *GM I 7*), he elsewhere says that the priest 'realizes that Christian morality was his means to *power*' (*EH IV 7*), that the priest is both 'sick' and 'strong', and 'even more a master of himself than of others' (*GM III 15*; see also *GM III 11, 13, 18*).

<sup>14</sup> Note Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Napoleon: a 'synthesis of the *inhuman* and the *superhuman*' (*GM I 16*; cf. *BGE 256*; Kaufmann 1974: 314–6). On the reading I'm gradually advancing, this is explained by the idea that Napoleon meets the conditions sufficient for flourishing but, given the goals he pursued (or means he took), he falls short of the excellence characterised by fully-fledged higher types.

<sup>15</sup> One might attempt to reconcile these conflicting strands by suggesting that he deploys (perhaps for specific rhetorical purposes) different conceptions of flourishing in different contexts: he sometimes grants that, relative to the potential priestly types have, they can flourish (they at least do the sorts of things needed to survive and prosper as priestly types); but, relative to some further standard of flourishing, they fall short. Perhaps it is fine to adopt different conceptions of flourishing to make different points. But if we're aiming to clarify what Nietzschean flourishing consists in, that merely postpones the issue without dissolving it: we're left with two (intensionally and extensionally) divergent conceptions, whereby the question remains which is preferable.

individuals who flourish by expressing who they are, despite the extrinsic resistances they meet (and despite their achievements not being recognised in their own life time—indeed, Nietzsche portrays himself as someone ‘born posthumously’ (*EH* III 1; *A F*)). In case you’re not persuaded, let me ward off some concerns. Resistance to the sufficiency model generated by this example comes from the following related thoughts: whether a person is able to flourish must depend at least in part on the social conditions she finds herself in; and our artist might flourish a lot more fully in different social conditions. However, the sufficiency model is entirely consistent with both thoughts. Whether our artist is able to express herself in the ways needed to flourish *does* depend on there being social conditions that do not *completely* impede her self-expression. Further, she could flourish *more fully* were her social conditions different. Nevertheless, accepting both points does not imply that, in the scenario described, she doesn’t flourish at all. Indeed, she flourishes more fully by expressing through her art important elements of who she is, than by conforming to others’ expectations and not expressing her creativity. So, it’s worth emphasising, the sufficiency model implies only that someone who satisfies (1) and (2) thereby flourishes *to some degree*.

A second possible doubt emerges by reconsidering the range of figures who (I suggested) could in principle satisfy (1) and (2) but Nietzsche disdains: the herdlike, the mediocre, priestly types, the monstrous, etc. The most obvious rationale for denying that they flourish is that, even if they satisfy (1) and (2), they fail to realize the kinds of external excellence that characterise Nietzschean higher types. This packs into the concept of Nietzschean flourishing the realization of relevant excellences. My initial response is to agree that such people do not excel but to say that they may nonetheless flourish (at least to some degree) relative to the types they are. By mastering their motives and realizing the goals they appropriately set themselves in ways that enable them to express who they are, they realize *their* potential—*it’s just that the potential they possess isn’t conducive to realizing external excellences.*

A counter-objection to that response, to be conclusive, would have to provide independent grounds for denying that non-excellent people, even though they satisfy (1) and (2), fail to flourish to any degree. I’m not sure how such an argument would go.<sup>16</sup> But there is a more *indirect* way to put pressure on

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<sup>16</sup> I also suspect that denying that non-excellent people can flourish to any degree, solely because they fail to realize external excellences, renders the dispute largely terminological: the sufficiency model claims they can flourish, whereas the insufficiency model implies they instead ‘schflourish’. An ‘ideological’ motivation behind the sufficiency model is this: if Nietzsche is to be of wider philosophical interest on the issue, we’d do better to attribute to him a more inclusive conception of flourishing.

the spirit of the sufficiency model here. This is to deny that the non-excellent could actually satisfy (1) and (2), whereby they fail to flourish. This wouldn't undermine the sufficiency model, though it would cast doubt on the implication I'm drawing from it: namely, that the non-excellent can flourish. So it's worth considering this approach. To do so, I'll briefly draw on a recent suggestion from Christopher Janaway (2012: 186–92).<sup>17</sup> The basic thought is this: to satisfy Nietzsche's conception of flourishing, one needs drives that are exceptionally strong and both diverse yet unified; that is a hallmark of great creative individuals but absent in the non-excellent—Rawlsian grass-counters, for instance, are unlikely to have particularly strong or diverse drives; thus only the excellent satisfy condition (1).

Let's grant that someone with exceptionally vehement and diverse-yet-unified drives is *more likely* to be a strong-willed creative individual of the kind Nietzsche extols. However, it's hard to see why priestly types, or grass-counters, etc., could not likewise satisfy such conditions, even though they then express who they are by realizing their priestly or mediocre goals. Such people seem both conceptually and empirically possible. But the objection requires they are not. So the objection faces an immediate philosophical difficulty. Moreover, Nietzsche himself allows that such types can be configured by conflicting drives, but that they realize their goals by ordering and mastering their drives and directing them into goals which, when realized, express the kinds of power they are capable of (*BGE* 200; *GM* III 15). Priestly types, for instance, are very effective at finding, or creating, conditions which enable them to satisfy (1) and (2) by exercising the kind of powers (over themselves and others) they are capable of. That is why they have the effects to which Nietzsche objects. So there are both philosophical and textual difficulties with the objection.

These considerations reflect two wider difficulties with objecting to the sufficiency model. Firstly, as noted (1) and (2) are partly formal conditions. They do not specify (as their input) any particular (types of) motives or goals you must have in order to flourish. It is therefore unclear how a formal account like this could deliver (as output) the result that *only* those individuals with *particular types* of motive or goal can

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<sup>17</sup> See also Richardson 1996; Gemes 2009; Tanesini 2012. Janaway's official focus is a slightly different idea he labels Nietzschean 'greatness'. But he concurs that greatness involves meeting the sorts of conditions, like (1) and perhaps (2), I'm associating with flourishing; so I don't think he would object to transposing his account of greatness to what I'm saying about flourishing. (In the published version of his paper, Janaway is tentative about committing to the claim that only great individuals satisfy (1) and (2), though he seems more attracted to this than I am.)

flourish.<sup>18</sup> The second difficulty is more parochial to Nietzsche. Many formal accounts of Nietzsche's perfectionism develop an account of agency—of what it is to be an ideal agent, or even an agent at all—via formal conditions that are designed to exclude those types of people Nietzsche disdains (e.g. priestly types) from counting as ideal agents (or even agents at all). Many such accounts gnaw. Here is a speculative diagnosis as to why: they run together two different values, flourishing and external excellence, on the assumption that flourishing individuals and individuals who achieve (externally) excellent things are extensionally equivalent. Some writers set a relatively low bar for flourishing—usually to present a Nietzschean account of flourishing that we (non-excellent individuals) might be able to satisfy and that might therefore be of wider philosophical interest.<sup>19</sup> But, given the extensional equivalence assumption, such accounts are then committed to including non-excellent individuals amongst Nietzsche's *ideal* type. Others, in contrast, rightly set a high bar on Nietzschean excellence<sup>20</sup>—but, given the extensional equivalence assumption, are committed to saying that only individuals who achieve the highest excellences really flourish. A good way to avoid both difficulties is to keep these two goods, flourishing and external excellence, distinct.

So there is a good interpretative reason to see these as distinct. Once we do so, we can allow that a person might flourish (at least to some degree, relative to the type she is) yet not excel. If that's the case, there would have to be some further independent argument to show that (1) and (2) are not sufficient for flourishing. But here is a further reason to accept the sufficiency model. The following two defeasible generalisations are independently plausible: (a) if you satisfy (1) and (2), that is good for you (at least to some degree); and (b) if you realize what it is good for you to realize (by satisfying (1) and (2)), that is conducive to your flourishing. Yet if (1) and (2) are not sufficient for flourishing, we are committed to rejecting either (a) or (b). And rejecting either (a) or (b) looks less plausible than allowing that (1) and (2) are sufficient for Nietzschean flourishing.

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<sup>18</sup> Granted, this is far from decisive: it remains open to tweak one's formal account in the quest for extensional adequacy. But the worry is that wrinkles in the carpet always reappear elsewhere (hence the long history of failures in moral philosophy to deliver the extensionally perfect substantive results sought from merely formal apparatus)—and that the only way to avoid this is to insert additional substantive conditions into the account in ways that ultimately render it indiscernible from overtly substantive accounts.

<sup>19</sup> See Owen 2007; Ridley 2009; Janaway 2012.

<sup>20</sup> See Hurka 2007; Reginster 2007.

Crucially, though, nothing I've said here rules out the possibility that (e.g.) priestly types flourish *less* than higher types—nor even that they flourish less because of the particular (pernicious or otherwise non-excellent) goals they realize. Indeed, the sufficiency model is consistent with the claim that, although priestly types can flourish, they are incapable of flourishing to the same degree as higher types—and that this may be because of the kinds of goals they pursue. (I develop this idea in the next section.) Sufficiency is a threshold concept; and accepting that (1) and (2) are sufficient for Nietzschean flourishing implies only that someone who meets these conditions meets some *minimal* level for flourishing.<sup>21</sup> So if you worry that the sufficiency model precludes saying that higher types flourish to a greater degree than lower types, you needn't.

To help move on to further matters, I'll hereon suppose that (1) and (2) are sufficient for Nietzschean flourishing (subject to the caveat mentioned near the start of this section). The next section turns to its *value*. It first outlines the primary sense in which flourishing is good and then explains how the flourishing of some people may be *better* than the flourishing of others.

#### 4. Flourishing: its value

At the level of individuals, the primary mode in which flourishing is good is that it is good for the person whose flourishing it is. So understood, flourishing is a primarily *prudential* good (your flourishing is good for *you*); and its value is primarily *relational* (it is 'good *for...*').<sup>22</sup> This is consistent with saying that flourishing is also *finally* valuable: your flourishing is good for you, not (or not only) as a means to something else of value, but for its (or for your) own sake (see *WP* 877–8).<sup>23</sup> Flourishing might be good in other ways too. Here, though, I focus on its being good for the person whose flourishing it is.

This can be read as a claim that the property of flourishing is good for the person who has it. But regarding only the *logical* connection between flourishing and value, the core idea is this: *if A flourishes, that*

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<sup>21</sup> What I've said is also consistent with maintaining that priestly and mediocre types *rarely* flourish; indeed Nietzsche may set a very high bar for satisfying (1) and (2). My point is just that it's unconvincing to insist that it is *impossible* that they flourish.

<sup>22</sup> For similar claims, see Leiter 2002: 106ff. The account I sketched in §2 nonetheless departs from Leiter's in various ways, including that it does not presuppose '*unchanging* type-facts' about agents.

<sup>23</sup> I'm assuming a difference between a final/instrumental value contrast and an intrinsic/relational value contrast (see e.g. Korsgaard 1983). So I'm *not* attributing to Nietzsche the claim, which many rightly object to on textual grounds, that some things are *intrinsically* valuable in some metaphysically more laden sense. For worries about how some commentators conflate the final-intrinsic distinction, see Robertson 2009: 83-4; Thomas 2012: 139.

is good for *A*.<sup>24</sup> On the substantive Nietzschean reading of flourishing, according to which (1) and (2) are sufficient for human flourishing, this implies that: *if A achieves a relevant degree of psychological unity and expresses who she is by realizing the goals she appropriately sets herself, that is good for A*.<sup>25</sup>

As with flourishing, the *value* of flourishing comes in degrees. Considering a single person's whole life, the more that person flourishes the better her life as a whole (qua flourishing)—at least subject to familiar provisos regarding the *shape* of her life, including that a better life is more likely to involve an upward trajectory of flourishing than a downward degeneration.<sup>26</sup> Let's say that, relative (only) to the flourishing *A* is capable of (and thus bracketing all else, i.e. everything aside from *A*'s flourishing), if *A* flourishes to the maximum degree she is capable of, *A* lives a life that is *maximally good* (or best) for *A*. And, relativised in the same way, the degree to which *A* flourishes correlates to the degree to which the life *A* lives is good for *A*. So, in that restricted sense, the higher the degree to which *A* flourishes the better for *A* her life is. This allows for comparisons between the value of flourishing attending a person's actual life and alternative trajectories of that person's life. And that is important if we want to allow that, by flourishing more, you can live a life that is better for you than a life in which you flourish less.

We can extend this basic model to also allow for some interpersonal comparisons.<sup>27</sup> Consider, firstly, the following simplified two-agent case. Suppose that *A* maximises her potential and in that sense flourishes maximally relative to the degree of flourishing she is capable of, whereas *B* falls significantly short of flourishing to the degree he is capable of. Relative only to the flourishing *A* and *B* are capable of (thus holding all else equal), we can say that the life *A* lives is better for *A* than the life *B* lives is for *B*.

Now consider a second case, in which all else is *not* equal. *A* and *C* both flourish equally (let's suppose maximally) relative to the degree of flourishing they are capable of (they each realize their

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<sup>24</sup> (a) It might of course be good in some further respect *that* some people do not flourish (or do not flourish in the ways they do); but that's consistent with the thesis that a person's flourishing is good *for that person*. (b) 'Good' here is pro tanto. You might flourish in a way that is good for you to some degree even if (say) the severe social conditions you are in are such that, by flourishing to a high degree now, you undermine the conditions you need to flourish later in life. It may sometimes be overall prudent, given the conditions you are in, *not* to maximise your potential and hence not to flourish maximally relative to that potential. If so, prudential considerations besides those to do with flourishing could make it the case that it's better for you not to flourish (even though flourishing would still be pro tanto good). There might in turn be 'tragic' conflicts between different strands of prudence.

<sup>25</sup> I'm here ignoring whether satisfying only (1) or only (2) could be good for you. There are several possible routes to take on this, though these issues won't affect the present account.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. McMahan 1988; Velleman 1991. Note Nietzsche's own remarks on dying at the right time when no longer in ascendency (e.g. *TI* 'Expeditions' 36).

<sup>27</sup> Some readings of Nietzsche implicitly rule out a plausible ways to make such interpersonal comparisons (e.g. Leiter 2000; see Robertson 2009: 82–3). Many accounts fail to adequately explain degrees of value entirely; the following is intended to fill this gap.

potential fully). But A produces excellent art of the kind Nietzsche extols, whereas C realizes goals that Nietzsche thinks either utterly unimpressive (mundane or mediocre, say) or positively disvaluable (perniciously priestly, say). Nietzsche could hold that A's life is better, more valuable, in some important respects. But would he judge that A and C flourish equally, so that the life C lives is just as *good for C* as the life A lives is *good for A*? There are two main views to take on this. On what we could call the 'narrow' model, the degree of value that a person's flourishing has for that person is determined exclusively by the degree to which the person satisfies conditions (1) and (2). On that model, since A and C flourish equally, C lives a life that is just as good for C as the life A lives is good for A, even though A excels and C does not. On a second view, although satisfying (1) and (2) are sufficient for flourishing to some degree, the degree of value that a person's flourishing has for that person can be determined by factors besides whether she satisfies (1) and (2). Such factors may include the value of the goals the person realizes. Call this the 'wide' model. On this model, A's life could be better for A than C's life is for C, precisely because A excels and C does not.

So, would (or should) Nietzsche endorse the narrow or wide model? The narrow model implies that, insofar as a priestly, a mediocre and a higher type each realize their potential to the same degree, (i) the life a priestly or mediocre type lives could be just as good for him as the life a higher type lives is good for her, and (ii) that a priestly or mediocre type could flourish to the same degree as a higher type. The wide model allows us to deny both (i) and (ii). I suspect that Nietzsche would opt for the wide model. Doing so makes sense of how, even though non-excellent people can flourish, the *kind* of flourishing higher types realize is significantly better than the *kind* of flourishing the non-excellent (e.g. priestly and herdlike types) realize—and *better*, not just in the sense that higher types live better (e.g. more impressive or admirable) lives, but in that the life a higher type lives is better *for her* than the life a priestly or mediocre type lives is *for him*. In short, the wide model allows that you can flourish to a greater degree and live a life that is better for you if you pursue and realize *more worthwhile* (or, for Nietzsche, genuinely excellent) goals. That's independently plausible.<sup>28</sup> The narrow model does not allow for this. That's a reason to prefer to the wide model.

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<sup>28</sup> For a structurally similar model of value, see e.g. Parfit 1984: 501–2. Here's a related rationale for preferring the wide model. Imagine that person A has the potential to realize highly valuable goals (great art, say). On one trajectory A realizes that potential. On another trajectory, however, A suffers a dreadful accident, leaving her



Here's a second reason to prefer it. Suppose that C flourishes maximally relative to his potential but realizes disvaluable or mediocre ends, whereas D excels by realizing some genuinely excellent goals yet flourishes considerably less than she could relative to her potential. Now consider the question 'who flourishes more and thereby lives a better life: C or D?'. I suspect that many Nietzscheans will reply 'D'; but I also suspect that many of us will be unsure either way. Note, though, that the narrow model implies that C lives a life that is better for him than the life D lives is for her. The wide model meanwhile allows for (though does not require) the converse verdict. It accommodates the verdict 'D lives a better life' because it allows that D's life could be better in virtue of D's realizing more worthwhile goals. (It does not mandate this verdict, though, because unlike the narrow model it allows that the degree of value a person's life has for that person depends on more than just the degree to which she satisfies (1) and (2)—it may also depend on, e.g., how valuable realizing excellences is.) Furthermore, this now helps explain why you might be uncertain as to whether C's life is better for C than D's life is for D (or vice versa). The explanation is that there are two *different* values in play: flourishing *and* excellence. And the presence of these two competing values makes it difficult to give a decisive singular verdict, for we don't yet know how the value of these two values combines. So, unless you have the resolute intuitions that C lives a more flourishing life than D and that C's life is better for C than D's life is for D, you should find the wide model more attractive. (This also provides additional grist to my mill that we should keep flourishing distinct from excellence; otherwise it is hard to know how we could, even in principle, come to judgements about C and D.)

Much more detail can be given; but this will suffice for getting the basic view of flourishing and its value onto the table. So far, then, I've outlined a substantive account of Nietzschean flourishing via two main sets of conditions and offered a model for understanding how flourishing can be good for a person. Along the way, I've also explained how we can compare the value of flourishing across different people; plus I've offered some reasons for why, if we are to make sense of Nietzsche's evaluative views, we need to distinguish flourishing from external excellences. We now turn to the latter.

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potential markedly diminished (though, let's imagine, she is unaware of this). On this second trajectory, the person, call her A\*, is able to realize only very mundane goals. Yet even if A and A\* realize their potential to the maximal degrees they are each then capable of, we would ordinarily prefer to live the life of A and would think A lives a more flourishing life than A\*. That supports the wide model.

## 5. External excellences

I've suggested that flourishing is something that could in principle be achieved by people aside from Nietzschean higher types. What distinguishes higher types from the rest, though, is that they also excel by realizing genuinely excellent ends. Two initial points.

First, 'excellence' is itself an evaluative term. It denotes something that is not *merely* good, but *highly* or *exceptionally* good—great, impressive, admirable, say. 'Excellence', as I'm using it, is not confined to attributive uses (as a predicate modifier) in the sense that if  $x$  is (attributively) good then it is a good  $x$ . It might be true that Paul was a good Christian and Jack the Ripper an excellent serial killer—in that, relative to whatever is required for succeeding in these roles, Paul and Jack did pretty well. But it does not follow (and on substantive grounds Nietzsche would no doubt deny) that the things Paul and Jack did to excel *qua* Christian and *qua* serial killer were good (let alone excellent) in some further (non-attributive) respect. De Vinci, on the other hand, was not only an excellent example of an *artist* but (on the view I'm advancing) manifested excellence in some further (non-attributive) respect. What distinguishes them is the value of the goals they pursued and realized: Paul and Jack realized disvaluable ends (albeit very effectively), whereas de Vinci produced something exceptionally valuable, i.e. excellent. I'll thus be treating 'excellence' as an evaluative predicate (not a predicate modifier) to denote things which are good in some respect not picked out by merely attributive uses.

Second, it is worth asking whether Nietzsche regards achievements, or the people who achieve them, as excellent. On the one hand, central to his perfectionist vision is an ideal type of person, for whom he offers various epithets: 'free spirit' (*GS* 347; *BGE* chap. 2), 'higher type' (*BGE* 62, 228; *A* 4; *EH* 'Destiny' 4), 'noble' person (*GS* 55; *BGE* chap. 9, 287), 'great' person (*WP* 957), arguably also '*Übermensch*' (*ZP*:3; *A* 4; *EH* 'Books' 1, 'Destiny' 5). As prospective exemplars he supplies an initially diverse-looking assortment of individuals, including Caesar, da Vinci, Goethe, Beethoven. And he repeatedly cites a selection of capacities or qualities of character (often in association with such exemplars) that might variously be understood as preconditions for, or in some cases partially constitutive of, being an excellent individual—notably, certain 'self-oriented' qualities (some of which are also necessary for flourishing): self-mastery (*D* 109; *BGE* 200, 260; *TI* 'Expeditions' 49; *WP* 46), the self-discipline needed to endure suffering and overcome (internal and external) resistances (*BGE* 212, 225, 260, 270), an independent self-

determining will needed to set and realize one's goals (*BGE* 29, 60; *GS* 290, 347), self-sufficiency (*GS* 55; *BGE* 44, 212, 260, 274, 284) and self-reverence (*GS* 287, 290). Much of Nietzsche's emphasis falls upon what it is to be an excellent person; and he often appears to extol certain persons because they manifest a range of self-oriented qualities rather than their particular achievements. However, I also argued, a person may possess and exercise such qualities yet direct her activities toward goals that we (or Nietzsche) would deny manifest excellence. In light of this, although Nietzsche often attributes excellence to people, a person manifests excellence only by achieving excellent things.

This now invites a big question: what counts as an excellent achievement in Nietzsche's view, and why? His own examples typically focus on great art, music, science and philosophy (maybe also some political feats), though this might be extended to include other achievements that involve overcoming significant challenges in ways requiring exceptionally high levels of self-mastery and effective agency. More than this, however, Nietzsche says conspicuously little—conspicuously little, that is, about which goals (if realized) would represent excellent achievements and how precisely to distinguish these from accomplishments falling short of the highest excellence. This may seem a glaring omission. However, there may be a good explanation for it: excellence, Nietzsche holds, is *uncodifiable*.<sup>29</sup> The rest of this section explains why.

A first point concerns the psychological unity that I earlier suggested is a necessary ingredient in Nietzschean flourishing. Higher types are marked by especially strong, but also diverse, drives which they redirect in a unified way (*BGE* 200; *TI* 'Expeditions' 49). Plausibly, such a person is more likely to produce something interestingly novel: the greater diversity in motives one starts from, the more likely one is turn out different from the norm—more likely to make something novel of *themselves* and to thereby '*become those [they] are* [...] human beings who are new, unique, incomparable [...] who create themselves' (*GS* 335).<sup>30</sup> Yet how a person makes something novel of herself by ordering her diverse motives is not something for which we could provide a codifiable blueprint.

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<sup>29</sup> A different explanation, touted by e.g. Hurka 2007 and Janaway 2012, is that Nietzsche offers a formal account of excellence. For worries about whether an exclusively formal account can do *all* the work needed to distinguish excellence from non-excellence, see Reginster 2007, Robertson forthcoming (Ch.9), as well as §3 of the present paper.

<sup>30</sup> Contrast someone who internalizes the norms and demands of some external, e.g. socio-moral, authority. This likely leads her to suppress or extirpate motives antithetical to the norm, in turn stifling whatever capacity for independence of thought and action she may have had. The result is someone who not only obediently conforms to pre-established norms but becomes much like others in the herd (see *GM* I 14, II, III, 1; *BGE* 199; *GS* 290, 347).

Second, free spirited higher types are self-determining agents who set their own goals. Nietzsche repeatedly emphasises that a free spirit is marked by considerable independence of thought and action: she is ‘the exception’ who ‘thinks otherwise than would be expected’ (*HAH* 225), who stands apart from the herdlike majority (*HAH* 225ff; *GS* 55; *BGE* 44, 212, 260, 274, 284) and who, rather than submitting to pre-established externally-legislated authorities, possesses an independent self-determining will the exercise of which involves setting her own ends (*GS* 290, 301, 335, 347; *Z* ‘Of the Thousand and One Goals’; *BGE* 29, 60, 260; *GS* 290, 347; *A* 11). A free spirit is a great experimenter and innovators (*HAH* P4; *D* 453, 501, *BGE* 42, 205, 210; *GM* II 24; *WP* 957), someone who, through creative activity, realizes novel ends in novel ways (*HAH* 231; *GS* 301, 335; *BGE* 260). Indeed, a free spirit ‘feels himself to be the determiner of values... he creates values’ (*BGE* 260; cp. *GS* 301, 335; *Z* “Of the Thousand and One Goals”). It is not entirely clear what it is to ‘create values’. But one thing Nietzsche must mean is that a free spirited higher type creates or sets her own ends and that her realization of those ends is (qua realizing excellence) valuable. Again, though, what goals a *self-determining, independent, innovative* and *experimental* free spirit creates for herself is not something we can specify via some generic formula.

Third, excellence itself, by its very nature, precludes a codifiable recipe. On Nietzsche’s view it involves doing something extraordinary, novel, surpassing conventional idioms, and so on, and is the result of immensely creative activity—the ‘really great men’, Nietzsche writes, are ‘men of great creativity’ (*KSA* 11: 37[8] / *WP* 957; cf. *GS* 290, 301, 335). Yet creativity, by its very nature, is not something for which we can offer a determinate recipe explaining how to achieve it.<sup>31</sup>

The first general conclusion to be extracted concerns why Nietzsche nowhere gives a blueprint for excellence—an account specifying with any determinate content what as-yet-unrealized excellent achievements would look like: excellence is achieved by individuals who unify a diverse array of motives in unique ways and whose actions are subsequently creative and rule-transcending. That’s not to say that we cannot recognise excellence once achieved. It explains, rather, why we cannot specify in advance what exactly excellence consists or hence how to achieve it.

A second important conclusion concerns the relation between flourishing and excellence. Achieving excellence typically requires satisfying the conditions for flourishing (represented by conditions

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<sup>31</sup> See Ridley 2009 for extended analysis and defence of this idea.

(1) and (2) from §2). Moreover: since a higher type's motives, which she needs to express through action in order to express who she is, are directed towards goals which (if realized) exemplify excellence, it is *by realizing relevant excellences that she flourishes*. This account therefore shows how flourishing and excellence, though distinct, are connected. They are distinct in that someone may flourish without excelling. Nonetheless, someone who excels typically thereby flourishes.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, insofar as higher types are characterised by strong drives that need expressing, and insofar as they express themselves by realizing goals they not only find meaningful but are genuinely valuable qua realizing great excellences, it is likely (given the wide model defended in §§3–4) that they will flourish to a very high degree.

## 6. The value of excellence

Flourishing is good for the person whose flourishing it is but it need not be good in any further respect. Realizing excellence is also typically good for the person who realizes it, since someone who realizes excellence typically flourishes. Nonetheless, excellence is also valuable in some further respect. This section briefly clarifies what kind of value excellence has.

On the one hand, the evaluative core of excellence is primarily non-prudential rather than prudential. Beethoven's musical compositions, let's suppose, are examples of highly excellent human achievement. But the value they have qua excellence is not primarily a matter of their being good *for Beethoven* (e.g. enabling him to flourish); nor is their value primarily a matter of their being good *for us* (e.g. through giving us pleasure or facilitating our flourishing). On the other hand, the value of excellence is not primarily relational, at least not in the sense that the kind of value Beethoven's finest compositions manifest is well understood in terms of their being *good for*. Their value, rather, has something to do with

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<sup>32</sup> I say 'typically' because there is at least conceptual space to imagine someone who excels but does not flourish. It is worth considering some different cases here, to see how typical the connection is. Imagine firstly a tortured genius: someone who excels but lives what looks a pretty miserable life (a Frege, Wittgenstein, Turin, or indeed Nietzsche, perhaps). However, this is not problematic for the model I've developed. Insofar as such people express something important about who they are through the excellences they achieve, they flourish to at least some degree relative to the types of people they are. (Flourishing should therefore be distinguished from purely experiential, e.g. hedonistic, accounts of a good life: a flourishing life need not be one of pleasure in a standard hedonistic sense—as Nietzsche surely agrees; see e.g. GM III 14; *TI* 'Maxims' 12.) Secondly, we might imagine someone who achieves something excellent but does not thereby express who she is in the ways needed to flourish, perhaps because she loathes the activity she excels in. There is room for manoeuvre here: we might suggest that she expresses *something* important about herself and that this is why she spends the time she does producing the excellence she does—she thereby flourishes to some degree at least. However, *if* there are extreme cases where even that is false, we may just admit that excelling *typically* implies or presupposes, but does *not* strictly entail, flourishing.

simply being excellent. One way to capture this is to say that excellence is *finally* valuable—admirable or impressive, say, i.e. worthy of admiration, for its own sake, rather than as a means to (or for the sake of) something else valuable. Specific excellent achievements are likewise admirable, impressive, etc., in their own right or for their own sake—great simply as expressions of humankind’s highest potential. I don’t think there is much more we can say, or need to say, about the *kind* of value excellence is.

Calling something ‘excellent’, though, also implies that it is exceptionally good. And, Nietzsche sometimes suggests, realizing the highest excellences is *more valuable* than anything else (or those people who realize them are better than others). This raises a number of issues concerning *how* the value of excellence compares to other goods: whether, say, one instance of excellence is more valuable than *any* number of instances of other goods, whether that’s because excellence is incommensurably more valuable than other goods, whether its value lies on a different evaluative scale discontinuous from other goods, and so forth. Although Nietzsche didn’t explicitly broach such issues, one may expect him to take a strong perfectionist stance according to which excellence is discontinuously better than other goods. This might imply that the excellence of the few is discontinuously superior to the mere flourishing of the many.<sup>33</sup> There are nonetheless a number of possible routes to go on these issues.<sup>34</sup> And we need not follow Nietzsche. Indeed, we could reject that aspect of his perfectionism whilst holding onto everything else I’ve outlined in the account of flourishing and excellence so far. To conclude, I’ll draw the preceding ideas together and explain why the general model which has emerged may be attractive.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The account offered is in effect a perfectionist model of a good life. Central to it are two fundamental goods: flourishing and excellence. The evaluative core of flourishing is relational and prudential: flourishing is good for the person whose flourishing it is. The evaluative core of excellence, in contrast, is non-relational and non-prudential: an achievement embodying excellence is, simply, excellent—exceptionally good in its own right, as an expression of the highest human potential. I hope that the account is attractive at a number of levels.

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<sup>33</sup> Relevant passages include *SE* 6 (esp. pp.161–2); *BGE* 258; *GM* I 17; *WP* 766. In Robertson forthcoming (Ch.9) I argue that this does not imply, and that Nietzsche does not seek to promote the excellence of the few through, some strongly anti-egalitarian set of social-political arrangements (contrast e.g. Hurka 2007).

<sup>34</sup> See the vast literature devoted to Mill on higher/lower pleasures—raising issues too vast to broach here.

At an *interpretative* level, firstly, it enables us to combine elements that Nietzsche inherits from two different perfectionist traditions. Commentators do not always clearly distinguish flourishing and excellence, let alone explain how they are connected. This often generates interpretative and philosophical difficulties. The account offered provides a way to avoid these problems. Along the way, furthermore, I've synthesised and reconciled a number of potentially competing strands within Nietzsche's conception of flourishing, explained how it is connected to excellence, and provided a way to assess degrees of value (including interpersonal comparisons).

At a *structural* level, secondly, the account combines both prudential and non-prudential goods. Even those unsympathetic to the substantive aspects of Nietzsche's own perfectionism—the romanticised and demanding account of creative excellence, say, or the evaluative supremacy of excellence over the good of individuals—could accept its underlying structure. Indeed, one could replace the Nietzschean good of excellence with a substantively different account of non-prudential (even moral) value.

Nonetheless, and thirdly, I also hope that the model of a good or flourishing life is *substantively* plausible. In the broadest terms, flourishing requires psychological efficacy and effective agency, and a suitable mesh between them. From this there emerged a wider set of general features: self-understanding, psychological integration, autonomy, expressing yourself through your agency, realizing goals you find meaningful. These are goods that it is independently plausible to suppose are necessary for a person's life going well and contribute to one's living a minimally good or fulfilling life. Furthermore, the account also allowed space for (though did not mandate) the thought that a person might flourish more fully if she realizes independently more valuable goals. For Nietzsche, such goals are those embodying the highest excellences. But whether we follow him on that or not, the underlying idea is again plausible: we often do think that someone flourishes more fully and lives a better life insofar as she realizes more worthwhile ends.

Note that at an *axiological* level the account share certain affinities with what is sometimes called a 'substantive good' or 'objective list' model (Scanlon 1998: chs.2–3; Parfit 1984: 501–2).<sup>35</sup> To use

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<sup>35</sup> (a) More precisely, its overall structure is a little like Parfit's hybrid *objective list* and *desire-fulfilment* model: your life will generally go better if there is an appropriate alignment between what you desire and what is 'objectively good'. There are important differences, though, including that on the Nietzschean account what is objectively good for a

terminology I've so far avoided, the model is compatible with the idea that flourishing and excellence for Nietzsche are or could be *objectively valuable*, at least in the following minimal sense: their being valuable (your flourishing being good for you, say, or Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony being an excellent achievement) does not depend solely on whether any particular person believes they are good or approves of them. The substantive conditions for flourishing identified—self-understanding, psychological integration, autonomy, effective self-expressing agency, realizing goals you find meaningful, etc.—could likewise indicate 'objective' goods: whether your realizing them contributes to your living a flourishing life in ways that are good for you does not depend solely on whether you believe they are good or approve of them. Whether each of these good should be included on such a 'list' is a substantive matter open to substantive dialogue; I've tried to show how it is plausible to include them on such a list. One common objection to objective list models is that they are insufficiently sensitive to the particularities of the individuals it claims the items on its list are good for. A virtue of the Nietzschean account is that this objection does not get a footing. Recall that the general goods listed can be realized in many different ways; and how they must or may be realized in ways that contribute to a *particular* person's living a good or flourishing life will depend on a range of *subjective conditions* relating to *that* person—including, crucially, her motives, but also her psychological setup more generally, her abilities, and the social context she finds herself in. Given these variables, something that is good for one person may not be good for another. In this regard, although we can specify in general terms a range of features integral to a good or flourishing life, the ways that it is good or appropriate for an individual to realize these general goods depends on the nature and situation of that individual (something for which, as with Nietzschean excellence, there is no universal recipe). Hence the 'objective' character of the general goods listed is moderated by the subjective and contextual conditions that shape and constrain how the goods are appropriately realized by different individuals. The objective character of the general goods thus prevents the account collapsing into a crude subjectivism; yet the subjective conditions ensure that the account is suitably sensitive to the individuals it claims those general goods are good for.

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person is *partly constituted by* the subjective conditions (motives, abilities, etc.) that make that person the particular person she is—see below. (b) Objective list models are typically regarded as the main alternative to hedonistic (or, more generally, experiential) and desire-satisfaction accounts of value. In Robertson forthcoming (Ch.10) I explain more fully how this Nietzschean model does not reduce to either of these and how, as a result, it avoids familiar difficulties with them.



Much more can be said both to motivate this account of Nietzschean value and to defend it against likely objections. For now, though, I merely hope to have got an interestingly different and potentially attractive position onto the interpretative table—and to have thereby shown that Nietzsche may have something distinctive and plausible to contribute to a central ethical issue: what is involved in living a good life.

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