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Against Nietzsche's Theory of Affirmation

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Affirmation is the pinnacle of Nietzsche's ethics and any attempt to outline a positive project in his work must grapple with its nature and its significance. The overall line he wants to take is clear and uncontroversial, exegetically speaking: where others have been nay-saying, Nietzsche wants to be a yea-sayer. But the devil is in the detail. From that detail, as this paper demonstrates, there emerge two clear conclusions. First, from *Beyond Good and Evil* onwards, we find a new and increasingly prominent variety of Nietzschean affirmation, which is crucial to the strategy of his later works. (I'll call this 'natural affirmation', for reasons which will become clear.) Second, for reasons internal to his own philosophical aims, Nietzsche's new variety of affirmation is fatally flawed. Put bluntly, if a little clunkily: Nietzsche himself requires that affirmation *not* perform exactly the role he requires that it perform. We are left with a major challenge to Nietzsche's late philosophical project. The aim of the paper, therefore, is to convince the reader of two things: first, that (late) Nietzschean affirmation operates as I say it does; second, that, by Nietzsche's own standards, it fails.

1. Nature and Affirmation: The Central Move

From *BGE* onwards, and especially after *BGE*, we find two thoughts repeated in Nietzsche's works. First, his ethics of affirmation. His admired historical and fictional characters, moralities and attitudes, and epochs are all lauded as yes-saying.[1] Correspondingly, he denigrates or criticizes those who 'say no' to life. Included among the nay-sayers—indeed exemplary among them—are adherents of what he calls 'Christian morality', a category that notoriously includes plenty of non-Christians, while excluding some nominal Christians (*TI,* 'Skirmishes', 9, *TI,* 'Morality', *BT,* P, 5, CW Ep.; *EH,* 'Destiny', 7; *GS,* 344).

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[1] Raphael: *TI,* 'Skirmishes', 9; the Renaissance: *EH, CW* 2, *CW* Ep.; Dionysus: *EH, BT,* 1–2; *EH,* 'Z'; Zarathustra: *EH,* 'Z', 6, 8; *EH,* 'Clever', 10; Nietzsche himself: *TI,* 'Germans', 6, 'Morality', 6, *EH,* 'Destiny', 1; the master morality: WC Ep., A 24; the eternal recurrence: *EH,* 'Z', 1; *amor fati*, tragedy: *EH,* '*BT*', 4. Unless otherwise stated, I have used the translations given in the bibliography. References to Nietzsche follow the standard abbreviations listed below.

Claims in support of affirmation (in some sense) and opposing Christianity are nothing new at this stage of his development. But the second thought is new, at least in its intensity: that 'Christian' moral thinking is anti-natural.[2] In some sense, that is, Christianity opposes the natural way of things and *this* is the problem with it: 'it is the lack of nature, it is the utterly gruesome fact that *anti-nature* itself received the highest honours as morality' which is so objectionable (*EH,* 'Destiny', 7). It would be hard to overemphasize the frequency with which Nietzsche, in this period, associates or even identifies 'Christian' morality with the anti-natural and it is part of the point of this discussion to show that his terminology is not accidental and not to be ignored (e.g. A, 24–6, A 'Gesetz' (*KSA,* 6, 254); *TI,* 'Morality'; *GM,* I 16, II 22–4, III 3, 12; *GS,* 344; *BGE,* 51, 55; *KSA,* 6, 431; 12, 330, 476–7, 541–2, 546, 571–2; 13, 320–4, 380, 402, 523, 599–600, 611–12; *WP,* 246). As often, what Nietzsche calls 'Christian' finds its clearest expression in Schopenhauer, who writes: 'just because it is bad, it is natural, and just because it is natural it is bad' (2000, *PP*, vol. 2, Section 156a). But the later Nietzsche also read contemporary accounts defining morality as 'mistrust of the natural', historical discussions of Christianity's origins in a supposedly unnatural Judaism and degeneration theorists complaining that modern morals were sickly and went against nature.[3]

These thoughts could be unrelated, if affirmation had nothing to do with natural morality. But in Nietzsche's late writings they are linked. Most accounts of Nietzschean affirmation explore it without the context of natural and anti-natural morality; as we shall see, they risk obscuring the central point.[4] For Nietzsche suggests that the reason why Christian moral thinking is life-negating *just is* that it is anti-natural: it 'taught men to despise the very first instincts of life' (*EH,* 'Destiny', 7; also *GM,* II, 22). Elsewhere, the coming tragic age of 'saying Yes to life' will follow the 'assassination of two thousand years of anti-nature' (*EH,* 'BT', 4). These quotes suggest a connection, but they do not explain it. For that, we need to look at the arguments Nietzsche offers, which make the connection clear. The arguments in question seek to establish that there is something either illegitimate or peculiar about Christian morality. They do this by treating Christian morality as anti-natural and, therefore, as anti-life. Our focus for the moment is *TI,* 'Morality', 4–5, in which two arguments are proposed (though both appear elsewhere), both starting with the same move linking the anti-natural with life-denial (see *TI,* 'Morality'; *EH,* 'Destiny' 7; *A*, 25–6).

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[2] e.g. one key term, 'anti-nature' (*Widernatur*), first appears in 1887: published in *GM,* I, unpublished in *KSA,* 12, 329. It appears more than thirty times after that.

[3] The quotation is cited in Sommer 2012: 554 (my translation). The original is from Viktor Hehn's *Gedanken über Goethe* (Berlin, 1888), which was influential for *TI*'s account of Goethe.. On the origins of Judaism, see Wellhausen (1886) and Stern (2019b) for discussion. One degeneration theorist was Charles Féré (e.g. 1888: 104), but in general see Holub (2018: 408–53).

[4] Cf. Hamilton (2000); Reginster (2006); and Came (2013). May (2011) has some mention of denial as anti-natural, but this is obscured by the thrust of his interpretation, which I discuss below.

(1) Christian morality claims that natural instincts and activities are wrong and to be avoided.

(2) Therefore, Christian morality implies the following value judgement about life: Life, as a whole, is bad.

Call this move from anti-natural values (1) to an implied value judgement about life as a whole (2) the 'Central Move'. Call the negative value judgement about life as a whole in (2) 'P'. The central move derives P from what Christian morality demands.

This being an internal critique of Nietzsche, I do not intend to challenge the Central Move itself. But we do need to see why it is *central* (for Nietzsche). Some of those whom Nietzsche considers to be life-deniers would happily assent to some version of P: these are the pessimists such as Schopenhauer, Bahnsen, Mainländer, and, arguably, Hartmann. But many would not: there are Christian theodiceans and atheist 'optimists' who would, by definition, reject P—they would say that life is wonderful or at least that it was not, as a whole, bad. The Central Move shows how and why those who explicitly deny P can still be taken to commit to it.[5] The Christian who explicitly denies P still condemns natural instincts (1), hence implicitly commits to P (via 2).

2. Two Arguments Against Christian Morality: Frame-of-Reference and Life-Psychology

Nietzsche has two replies to claims such as P, whether made explicitly or derived via what I'm calling the Central Move. First, a 'frame of reference' argument: value-judgements about life as a whole (such as P) cannot reasonably be made, because we cannot have the appropriate frame of reference to make such judgements. We are alive and therefore cannot make an appropriately independent judgement (see *TI,* 'Socrates', 2, *TI,* 'Errors', 8, and *GS,* 346).

Nietzsche also deploys a second argument, which I call his 'life-psychology' argument. In some sense, to be discussed, he holds that life itself is always making value-judgements through us. I'll use 'Life' rather than 'life' to indicate this personified force that does the judging, although of course the German makes no such distinction. In expressing the anti-natural thought that P, what must really be going on is that Life is making that judgement, through us, about itself. This, he thinks, should strike us as most peculiar: 'when we speak of values we do so

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[5] For the details of how various non-Christian philosophers, scholars, political agitators, and others are implicated in (1) and therefore (2), see Stern (2020: 15–22). The fact that one can explicitly deny P and nonetheless be committed to it implicitly also explains why Nietzsche can encourage affirmation and oppose denial while dismissing the optimism/pessimism dispute or '*Pessimisimusstreit*' as a whole (*CW* Ep.; *EH,* 'BT', 2; *GS,* P, 2; *TI,* 'Socrates', 2; *TI,* 'Morality', 5; also *BT,* P 1).

under the inspiration and from the perspective of Life: Life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values…From this it follows that even that *anti-nature of a morality* which conceives God as the contrary concept to and condemnation of life is only a value judgement on the part of Life' (*TI,* 'Morality', 5, translation altered, emphasis in original; *GS* P 2; *KSA,* 13, 44–5). The life-psychology argument treats anti-natural moralists, such as those who believe in the Christian god, as analogous to the British Diplomatic Service—that is, an organization which, by its very nature, has to promote British interests abroad—arguing, via its diplomats, that Britain is a malign and unstable state, which should be boycotted and sanctioned. Observers might perhaps treat this as a diplomatic strategy, but they ought to wonder what prompted the necessity (or perceived necessity) of adopting such a strategy. The life-psychology argument establishes that anti-natural moralists are *peculiar* and perhaps not to be taken at face value. But note: it does not touch on whether a claim such as P is true or not (just as Britain might indeed be malign and unstable). The frame-of-reference argument has seen to that.[6]

The upshot of reviewing these two arguments is that we can see how Nietzsche links affirmation and natural instincts. 'Christianity' attacks or condemns natural instincts of some kind. But, *in virtue of doing so*, Christians commit themselves to a value-judgement, P, about life as a whole. The problems with this value-judgement are revealed by the frame-of-reference and life-psychology arguments (so Nietzsche thinks).

3. Natural Affirmation

At the very least, the above considerations show that being not-anti-natural or not offering a condemnation of 'the instincts of life' (i.e. avoiding 1, above) amounts to a necessary condition for affirmation. That is because anyone who opposes what is natural (1) is read, by Nietzsche, as being hostile to, or denying, Life (2), and therefore endorsing P, and therefore subject to the frame-of-reference and life-psychology responses. But Nietzsche also makes the further suggestion that being 'natural' is a key component in being affirmative. A 'natural' morality, in contrast to the anti-natural and therefore life-denying moralities which he thinks have almost always been proffered, is a 'veneration of nature': it 'is dominated by an instinct of life—some commandment of Life is fulfilled […], some

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[6] Reginster (2006: 82–3) runs these two arguments together, without presenting their implicit derivation from anti-natural morality. The result is a focus on life's 'perspective' which misses the argumentative force of each argument, taken separately, as well as their corresponding difficulties. Nietzsche's point is not (just or primarily) that life provides 'the conditions of the very possibility of evaluation'; it is that life provides concrete *values* with sufficient clarity that opposing those values makes one anti-Life.

hindrance and hostile element on Life's road is thereby removed' (*TI*, 'Morality', 4, translation altered; also *WP*, 204). When moralities are dominated by a life-instinct, as opposed to when moralities attack life-instincts, we find a promotion of Life's 'commandment[s]': 'the measure', he writes in a note, 'is how far a man can say Yes to nature in himself,—how much or little he has to resort to ["the church's"] morality' (*KSA*, 12, 553).

The suggestion here is that a 'natural' morality is a life-affirming morality. I shall call this 'natural affirmation'. More specifically, natural affirmation is expressed by a set of values according to which what is natural (our natural instincts and tendencies) gets advanced, encouraged, or validated. The aim of the section is to explain further what natural affirmation means for Nietzsche and also to say more about the extent of Nietzsche's commitment to it. Before we look at textual and contextual evidence, just note that this view has common sense on its side: just as one denies Life by attacking those life-aims which are established within one, via one's instincts, so one affirms Life by acting upon and furthering the aims which Life has established within one, via the instincts. The affirmer is akin to the obedient server who says 'Yes, Ma'am!' to a request, or to the soldier who says 'Affirmative!' to an order—only in this case the order comes from Life.

This commonsense understanding of affirmation also happens to be Schopenhauer's, though of course his view is richer and more detailed. Hence it was one with which Nietzsche was intimately familiar and would have taken for granted in his readership. Schopenhauer's increasing scale of affirmation begins with self-preservation (feeding and nourishing the body), ascends to selfishness (self-preservation at the expense of another), and culminates in sexual reproduction (1969, *WWR*, I 60; 2000, *PP*, II, xiv, section 166).[7] His underlying thought is as follows: the Will-to-life tries to achieve its goals by, metaphorically and anachronistically speaking, *hard-wiring* them into our biological functioning; hence, we experience the will-to-life's demands as natural; hence, to go along with our natural, biological functioning is to go along with (i.e. affirm) what the will-to-life wants.

When we look to Nietzsche's understanding of what counts as natural in the period under discussion, we see Schopenhauer's view echoed and inverted. First, Nietzsche shares Schopenhauer's view of what counts as 'natural': self-preservation and selfishness (e.g. *EH*, 'Destiny', 7; *BGE*, 259); sexual reproduction (e.g. *A*'s 'Gesetz' (*KSA*, 6, 254)). An unpublished note connects the natural with sex, amusement, and physical advantage, and generally with not being 'ashamed of [one's] instincts'; another characterizes the unnatural as that which struggles

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[7] There are good reasons why sexual instinct is the pinnacle of affirmation for Schopenhauer (and a key focus for Nietzsche, as we shall see). It combines the following: pleasure; an instinct or drive which most people experience at some point; the means by which biological life is reproduced; and something which has been a very particular target for moralizing.

against 'sexuality' and the 'lust to rule' (*KSA*, 12, 482; *KSA* 13, 19–20). To be sure, Nietzsche has some additions to the Schopenhauerian nature/affirmation framework.[8] His later philosophy often connects the natural with health (discussed below) and with power or will to power, suggesting that power-seeking is natural or fundamental to life; hence, Nietzsche can claim that 'power' is a better word than 'life'.[9] Since 'will to power' is a characterization of the organic realm, of what is alive, I find it more helpful to speak of 'Life' in this context.[10] Given all of this, it would not be surprising to find that Nietzsche describes affirmative peoples or moral codes in terms of a commitment to the sorts of values which promote what is natural, in just the sense we have been outlining. That is, indeed, exactly what we find.

Nietzsche's account of the advent of Christian morality is billed as a move from a natural morality of exactly the kind described above to an anti-natural and life-denying morality. In A, 24–7, the (pre-Jewish) Ancient Israelites begin with a set of values which is life-affirming. Following the exilic and post-exilic priestly revaluation which (according to Wellhausen, Nietzsche's source) lead to the formation of Judaism proper, this 'life-affirmation…appear[s] evil'. On Nietzsche's account, the 'history of Israel', leading of course to Judeo-Christian morality, is 'a typical history of the denaturalization [*Entnatürlichung*] of natural values [*Natur-Werthe*]'. The connection between 'life-affirmation' and 'natural values' should be clear enough. The 'typical history' begins with natural affirmation: 'originally, […] even Israel stood in the *right* [*richtigen*] relation, that is to say, in the natural relation to things'. Affirmation is explained in terms of 'the ascending movement of life, well-constitutedness [*Wohlgeratenheit*, roughly, the state of having turned out well], power, self-affirmation on earth'; the natural Israelite morality is particularly characterized by 'consciousness of power' and 'delight in themselves'—power and self-centredness being, as we have seen, characteristic of the natural for Nietzsche. Their god, Yahweh, helps them grow their crops (for nourishment) and win their battles (for power).[11] In undermining this outlook, the priests are repeatedly described as attacking what is natural: they undertake 'the radical falsification of all nature, all naturalness'; all the 'natural events of life' are

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[8] One significant 'natural' activity, which Nietzsche directly connects with affirmation and which does not feature directly in Schopenhauerian affirmation, is getting things wrong. The scope and variety of interpretations regarding Nietzsche's error-philosophy, and its potential to play havoc with any area of Nietzsche's philosophy, makes discussion here impractical, but in a fuller discussion it would nonetheless have to find a place for it. On error and affirmation, see e.g. *BGE,* 4; *BGE,* 24; *BT,* P, 5; *KSA,* 12, 121. For discussion of error and natural affirmation, see Stern (2020: 21–2; 53–56).

[9] See e.g. *BGE,* 13, 259; *GS,* 349. *Z,* II 12 opposes the term 'life' because this suggests will to survival; hence 'will to power' instead. On life and survival, see below.

[10] See Hussain (2011) and Stern (2020) for more detailed discussion of the relationship between power and life. This account of the nature of will to power, as with my account of (natural) affirmation, is not intended to apply prior to BGE and it is most strongly in evidence after BGE.

[11] Wellhausen (1886) is Nietzsche's source for the move from a god of the nature-cult and national power to one of priestly pedantry; he also considers the later 'Priestly Code' to run counter to a natural religion. But Nietzsche's life-psychology, evident in *A* 24–7, is not in Wellhausen—a point which is missed in Jaggard's otherwise excellent account of their relation (2013: 347–51). See also Stern (2019b) on natural value in Wellhausen and Nietzsche.

'denaturalized' (from *entnatürlichen*, to make unnatural); 'every natural custom, every natural institution […], every requirement supplied by the instinct for life, in short everything valuable *in itself*, becomes utterly valueless'; in the end, Christian morality becomes 'the antithesis of life' (all quotations from A 24-6, translation modified, emphasis in original). Similarly, the Dionysian Greeks whose 'triumphant Yes to life' is lauded at the end of *TI*, focus their mysteries on the affirmation of sexuality, pregnancy, and birth. Christianity, in contrast, has 'made of sexuality something impure: it threw *filth* on the beginning' (*TI,* 'Ancients', 4–5).

As we can clearly see, Nietzsche connects what is natural both with what is 'valuable *in itself*' and with what is guided by the 'instinct for life'. What links the Ancient Israelites and the Dionysian Greeks, despite the differences in their moral codes, is that both moralities affirm some natural end in just the sense we have been describing. For the Greeks it is sexuality, pregnancy, and birth—Schopenhauer's most explicit targets, as instances of natural affirmation. For the Israelites, it is power, self-centredness, and, more generally, everything 'natural' and every 'requirement presented by the instinct of life'. As these examples show, natural affirmation need not simply amount to the crude thought that the more selfish we are, and the more we have sex and procreate, the better. He suggests, indeed, a pluralism about nature-moralities. But it looks as though an affirmative morality will, at least, entail a positive valuation of the natural and that, correspondingly, as another note has it, the stepwise 'denaturalization of morality' will be linked with 'morality's stepwise hostility to life' (*KSA,* 12, 380). In sum, as far as these passages are concerned, there are intrinsic natural values of the kinds we have listed, which are evident through our natural instincts, and affirmative moralities promote these values whereas life-denying moralities attack them. This conclusion does not entail that affirmation, for Nietzsche, *just is* natural affirmation. Of course, it might be argued, given further evidence, that natural affirmation is merely a necessary condition for some other, fuller kind of affirmation (call it 'affirmation proper'). The criticisms of natural affirmation that follow apply no matter which variant is chosen. Meanwhile, as we shall see, Nietzsche certainly does make use of a different notion of affirmation, to which we now turn.

4.   Total Affirmation and Suffering

Treatments of Nietzsche's views about affirmation have tended to focus on the strand of Nietzschean affirmation which asks us to affirm all of the events of the past and present. I'll call this 'total affirmation'. This is, at least, a reasonable interpretation of many of his comments on the subject, both before and during the period under discussion.[12] Nietzsche ends *TI*'s discussion of anti-natural morality

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[12]   See Stern (2019a) for further discussion.

by claiming that *any* attempt on the part of a 'moralist' to get an individual to change amounts to a kind of denial: 'the individual is, in his future and his past, a piece of fate, one law more, one necessity more for everything that is and every- thing that will be. To say to him "change yourself" means to demand that every- thing should change, even in the past…And there have indeed been consistent moralists who wanted man to be different…: to that end they *denied* the world' (*TI,* 'Morality', 6). Nietzsche's thought is as follows: every event, character, action, and state of affairs is interconnected, such that a change in one part necessitates a change to the whole. To affirm all but one limited part of reality is to reject all the interconnected remains—consequently, it is really a denial of the whole. Affirmation must be affirmation of the whole-as-it-in-fact-is. This thought is cer- tainly present in the period under discussion, notably (though not exclusively) via the image of the eternal return of the same (*EH,* 'BT', 2–3, 'Clever' 10, 'Z', 8; *BGE,* 56; *TI,* 'Errors', 8).

We can clarify the differences between total and natural affirmation by noticing that the term 'life' has a different referent in each case. 'Natural affirmation of life' uses 'life' to indicate Life's forces, instincts, or powers as they operate naturally through humans, animals, plants, and perhaps (Nietzsche sometimes suggests, though we won't pursue it here) through all matter. 'Total affirmation of life' uses 'life' to indicate past and present events. The key point here is that total affirmation appears more demanding than natural affirmation. The natural affirmer can affirm Life's ends while ignoring, regretting, denouncing, or dismissing those Christians who inhibited Life's ends. *Prima facie*, the 'total affirmer' cannot. How should the total affirmer stand to the activities of those who, for millennia, anti-naturally opposed Life's forces? If she approves, she affirms the anti-natural; if she disapproves and wishes it were otherwise, she fails as total affirmer.

There is a suggestion, at least, that Nietzsche intends these two strands to be united in the following way: by affirming the natural I am effectively affirming the totality, since the natural is what brings about the totality. If this is right, then the question as to how the total affirmer should stand towards anti-natural behaviour simply misses the point. *By* affirming the natural, the natural-affirmer just is, implicitly, a total affirmer and the natural-hence-total affirmer doesn't really need to say anything more explicitly about those who are anti-natural. This has a Schopenhauerian precedent: the Will constructs and organizes everything about the world. In our case, it uses what is 'natural' to us to aid its construction. Hence, 'affirmation' of our natural desires just is affirmation of the Will that stands behind all things and, therefore, the world it produces for itself through nature. A Nietzschean parallel is suggested in *TI,* 'Ancients', 4–5, when the Dionysian Greeks symbolically affirm the eternal recurrence (total) *via* their mysteries which affirm sex and rebirth (natural). Evidently, affirming sexual reproduction and the pain of childbirth does not suffice for affirming totally: the

'repetitions'—that is, generations of humans—are not identical and not all pain could reasonably be viewed as birth-like. Nonetheless, Nietzsche takes it to count, echoing Schopenhauer's claim that the affirmation inherent in the act of procreation extends to the suffering and death inherent in life (1969, *WWR,* I 60).

The linkage would also offer a further advantage. Namely, it can better deal with Nietzsche's remarks about suffering. Through the lens of total affirmation, Nietzsche's commitment to the (total) affirmation of suffering appears *prima facie* to demand that we affirm particular, and particularly nasty, personal and historical events. Many have noted this problem and have tried to confront it, typically by appealing to a narrative wholeness in which the repulsive elements are somehow redeemed or to their beautification and falsification (or both) (Hamilton 2000; Anderson 2005; May 2011; Stern 2013). In fact, natural affirmation also treats suffering, but in a less problematic manner. Likely following an interpretation of contemporary philosophical and scientific or quasi-scientific ideas, Nietzsche clearly takes it that suffering and displeasure *are* an unavoidable and natural part of being alive (Dumont 1876; Roux 1881); hence, it would be antinatural to seek to avoid *all* suffering at all cost (*BGE,* 259; *GM,* II 6–7; *KSA,* 12, 524, 530, 534; *KSA,* 13, 238, 265–7; *WP*, 576). The advocate of the biologically impossible notion of a 'life without suffering' would fall under (1) in the Central Move and, hence, would be a life-denier. It does not follow from this, however, that every individual instance of suffering must be affirmed or that suffering needs to be actively sought out.[13]

My point is not that the link between natural and total affirmation is unproblematic, nor that the problem of suffering is conclusively solved. Indeed, I shall eventually argue the opposite. But this interpretation does connect both prominent strands of Nietzschean affirmation which, as we have seen, would otherwise seem to conflict. And in doing so, it offers an improved and integrated understanding of Nietzsche's remarks on affirmation and suffering which has textual and contextual support.

In the next two sections, I look at two major problems for natural affirmation. I want to emphasize that these are not to be conceived of as external objections, arbitrarily aimed at Nietzsche from the outside. Rather, in the course of a sympathetic interpretation of his own aims, I take myself to be revealing a tension at the very heart of what he wants from his later project. What we shall see, after that, is that these problems also impact upon the proposed link between natural and total affirmation.

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[13] Reginster's (2006) account of affirmation and suffering commits Nietzsche to the counterintuitive view that we should desire resistance and suffering in the face of our own goals (Pippin 2008).

5.   First Problem: Why Choose Natural Affirmation?

The basic question about natural affirmation, which forms the core of our first problem, is as follows: why ought we to choose or prefer it? The natural moralist, after all, would appear to exhibit an equivalent version of the Central Move—call this 'Central Move (A)':

(1_a) The natural moralist claims that natural instincts and activities should be praised, valued and furthered.

(2_a) The natural moralist thereby implies the value judgement about life: 'life as a whole is good' (Call this judgement 'P_a').

Evidently, inasmuch as the frame-of-reference problem applies to P, it applies to the optimistic P_a: *both* are equally ungrounded. Nietzsche himself makes this perfectly clear, as did those who had offered frame-of-reference arguments prior to Nietzsche (*TI,* 'Socrates', 2; *GS*, P, 2; implicitly in *TI,* 'Morality', 5; Vaihinger 1876: 126, 177). The result is odd. Nietzsche is admiring or encouraging a natural morality of affirmation; the natural morality must imply the judgement that life is good (P_a); and this judgement is objectionable. In *TI*, 'Socrates', 2, Nietzsche goes further, claiming that judgements about the value of life, *for or against*, cannot be '*true*', though the arguments he gives there—namely, frame-of-reference and life-psychology—appear only to challenge the capacities of the judge, not the truth-value of the statement. If both Central Moves stand, then Nietzsche cannot ask that we prefer affirmation on the grounds that denial entails some unknowable or untrue judgement: affirmation does, too. There seems no reason to object to the Central Move without objecting to Central Move (A). Yet if both Central Moves fall, then Nietzsche cannot use either of his arguments against anti-natural morality. He cannot distinguish the affirmers from the deniers by asking if they would explicitly assent to P, since plenty of those he takes to be deniers would deny P and some would never have given the matter a moment's explicit thought.[14] The point is not to defend or attack the Central Move itself: the point is just that, for Nietzsche, for the reasons we have seen, it *must* hold. If one presents the frame-of-reference argument without the Central Move, one misses this problem (cf. Richardson 2013: 771; Han-Pile 2011: 230; Reginster 2006: 82–3; Müller-Lauter 1971: 78).

The frame-of-reference problem applies equally to natural and anti-natural morality. But the life-psychology argument does not. After all, what is peculiar and noteworthy about anti-natural morality is that Life speaks through its

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[14]   May (2011) argues that even weighing up whether life is to be affirmed or not is a mark of failure, but note that the central move applies to those who haven't weighed things up at all.

adherents (apparently) to *condemn* itself. In other words, whereas the frame-of-reference argument applies to P and P$_a$ equally, the life-psychology argument applies to P only. There's nothing strange about Life speaking through us to proclaim that it is good (P$_a$), any more than there would be something strange about the British Diplomatic Service arguing for sanctions against the United Kingdom to be lifted. Affirmers may be forced to imply an unknowable or untrue judgement—that the natural is good—but they are not aberrations, standing against the natural order of things. To put the point in other Nietzschean terms, though both affirmers and deniers commit to known-to-be-unknowable judgements, at least affirmers are *healthy*, where the anti-natural ascetic ideal has proved 'the real catastrophe in the history of the health of European man' (*GM,* III 21–2; also *GM,* II 24; *TI,* 'Morality', 4; *BGE,* 259). It would hardly be surprising for Nietzsche to advocate health at the cost of knowledge. As Reginster has it, for example, Nietzsche's life-psychology references contemporary medical understanding, according to which a function becomes 'unhealthy' when, in carrying out its normal function, it undermines its own functional capacity: hence, for example, the stomach, whose normal function is to digest, is 'unhealthy' when it starts to digest *itself* and hence undermines its digestive capacities (2013: 722–3). On this helpful model, negation is 'unhealthy' because Life undermines its normal function.

However, we are entitled to ask the question: why prefer health? (Or: why prefer Life's normal functioning?) One thought would be that health, the proper functioning of Life, is good. This, of course, is *exactly* what Nietzsche tells us cannot be claimed, via the frame-of-reference argument. But another argument might be from ease. We do not choose health over sickness because of some evaluation, the thought goes; we choose it because it is *nicer* for us. Adherents of 'natural' moralities make things easier for themselves; their anti-natural counterparts—some of them, at least—suffer terribly and unnecessarily. This is particularly appealing if we equate 'natural' with 'what comes most naturally, or most easily, to us'. Nietzsche, indeed, often highlights the unpleasantness of attempting to be good according to anti-natural morality, having 'inherited millennia of conscience-vivisection and animal-torture' (*GM,* II 24) against the natural instincts. Sometimes, he presents those who are better constituted as having an easier time or he links actions performed from the instinct of life with a certain joy (TI 'Errors', 2; A 11).[15] Other things being equal, the thought goes, a 'Victorian' attitude (as we might call it) to sexuality makes for a less easeful life than a post-sexual-revolution attitude, because the sex drive is natural.

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[15] *TI,* 'Errors', 2 cannot ultimately be offered as evidence that we should work towards being 'natural' for the sake of ease: Nietzsche is saying that already being well-constituted is easier, but the fact of having to take a reflective stance on how to act indicates that one is *not* well-constituted. Thus, even here, ease *ipso facto* cannot be a motivation to be more 'natural'.

But if the suggestion is that natural moralities are encouraged because they make for an easeful inner life, then we only need to look earlier in the very same chapter of *TI*, discussed above, to see the problem. At *TI*, 'Morality', 3, Nietzsche praises inner struggle and those who are 'rich in contradictions'; he suggests that the craving for inner peace is itself, in fact, a symptom of *anti-natural* morality which may, indeed, be more comfortable (*GM,* P, 6). The animal-instinctive (i.e. natural) path leads 'in most cases, to misery' (*GM,* III, 7), just as, elsewhere, unpleasantness is a natural and indispensable feature of life (*KSA,* 13, 360–1). *BGE,* 188 opposes those who *misidentify* '"nature"' (Nietzsche's quotation marks) with '*laisser aller*' or just letting yourself go and avoiding all difficulty.[16] Finally, Nietzschean 'health' is idiosyncratic. Individual survival, he holds, is not a prime goal of 'Life'. In Nietzschean terms, the 'unhealthy' may typically outlive the 'healthy' and Life can 'gain advantage' from some deaths: following Schopenhauer, suicide or action which puts one's own life at risk need not be 'life-denying' (e.g. *Z,* II, 12; *TI,* 'Untimely', 36; *GS,* 349). In several notes, Nietzsche advocates a social programme of forced sterilization of the 'sick' or 'degenerate', on the grounds that society must look after Life's interests (*KSA,* 13, 401, 599–600, 611–12; see also *A,* 2; on Nietzsche and eugenics, see Holub 2018: 408–53). Under certain circumstances, survival and procreation can be anti-Life.

The point of the discussion, up to now, has been to show that Nietzsche's commitment to natural affirmation is hard to square with the criticisms he wants to offer against anti-natural morality in such a way that he can, by his own standards, encourage us to be natural affirmers. My argument has been that he can't (yet) give us grounds for preferring the natural to the anti-natural. The reason he can't is precisely because i) he wants to dismiss as 'anti-natural' and 'denying' people who would happily state that life is good, enjoyable, and worthwhile (hence he needs the Central Move to stand) and ii) he wants, via frame-of-reference, to rule out value judgements about life as a whole per se as illegitimate. The result of these two commitments is that illegitimate value judgements must also be derived from those whom Nietzsche wants to promote, namely the natural affirmers. When it comes to the life-psychology argument, Nietzsche can certainly say that affirmers are less peculiar than deniers. But, I have suggested, he can't cash out this 'peculiarity' in a motivating way: it is not false than the alternative, nor necessarily less comfortable, nor likely to lead to a longer life for the individual.

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[16] Geuss (1999: 181) takes *BGE* 188 to suggest that 'it is, for Nietzsche, no objection to say that something is "contrary to nature"'. Hence, he suggests, 'nature' cannot be a criterion for judging a morality. But Nietzsche's point is narrower: that it is no objection to say that something is contrary to 'nature', just in the mistaken, *laisser aller* sense. As I have suggested, he certainly thinks it is an objection to say that something is 'contrary to nature' in what he takes to be the correct sense.

6. Second Problem: How Could We Not Choose
Natural Affirmation?

What I have called the first problem might be taken to be a reason to drop natural affirmation altogether. I have said, and we have seen, that there are other notions of affirmation at play in Nietzsche. Couldn't we just turn to one of those? One of my aims in this paper, though, is to point to the centrality of natural affirmation in (late) Nietzsche and hence to underline the claim that the tensions I am explicating are significant. We can't just drop it without, in an important sense, dropping *him* (see Stern 2020 for the centrality of natural affirmation to Nietzsche's late ethics). This section says more about why Nietzsche is committed to natural affirmation. But, in doing so, it also leads us to a second major problem with it.

It will help to recall the account of the founding figure in the 'Life-psychology' approach that Nietzsche adopts in his life-psychology argument: Schopenhauer.[17] Schopenhauer evidently holds that something like 'Life'—namely the 'will' or, which is effectively the same thing for our purposes, the 'will to life'—does value through us almost all the time, creating our intellect to become a tool for its various ends, even at the cost of the individual's survival or wellbeing (1969, *WWR,* I 54–5; *WWR,* II Chapters 15, 19, 22, 31). But there are particular moments in which the intellect ceases to serve Life's purpose. Hence, Life's values may be thwarted by its own tools, despite the fact that we are alive. Life-negating behaviour issues from an independent intellect which comes to resent Life as a hostile slave-driver. The point of this is that Schopenhauer wants *both* a life-psychology in which Life controls more or less all evaluations through the intellect *and* a special instance of an independent intellect which breaks free and evaluates on its own, independent of life-psychology. Schopenhauer's denial-psychology was attacked on at least two fronts. First, the idea that the intellect was the slave of the will, but a slave that could break free and control its master, was already known in Nietzsche's time to be a thorny feature of Schopenhauer's system (Beiser 2014: 171–2). Second, followers of the *Pessimismusstreit* (like Nietzsche) would have been familiar with arguments to the effect that Schopenhauerian life-denial, on the part of the living, is simply impossible.[18]

Nietzsche's reply to Schopenhauer combines both of these kinds of response: what Schopenhauer wrongly calls life-negating or will-independent activity is in fact peculiar, life-affirming activity; thus, Schopenhauer fails to realize that what he takes to be denial is really another mode of affirmation (generally, *GM,* III; see also *TI,* 'Untimely', 22 on art, sexuality, and affirmation). In effect, Nietzsche offers a form of abductive argument. Schopenhauer thinks that all apparently

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[17] On Schopenhauer's influence, see Schnädelbach (1984: 143).
[18] For different versions, both of which Nietzsche knew and commented on, see Strauss (1895: 96); Dühring (1865: 1–12).

will-independent activity, however varied and diverse, can ultimately be ascribed to the Will (or nature, Life)—except for ascetic activity. Isn't it more likely, Nietzsche is asking, that ascetic activity is *also* ascribable to the Will?

While this could function perfectly well as an internal problem for Schopenhauer to ponder, Nietzsche does not leave it at that, instead taking on Schopenhauer's life-psychology himself. Only Nietzsche's life-psychology often appears stronger than Schopenhauer's in such cases of apparent denial. Schopenhauer allows that Life can lose its force in ascetic contexts, whereas Nietzsche is less comfortable with that idea. Hence he writes (in a note): 'It makes no sense to assume that this whole victory of [Christian] values is anti-biological: one must try to explain it in terms of an interest Life has in preserving the type "man" even through this method of the dominance of the weak and the under-privileged' (*KSA,* 13, 369, adapting the translation in *WP,* 864; see also *KSA,* 12, 572). For Nietzsche, in such instances of apparent 'denial', Life *is* in fact exercising its power, but the circumstances that would lead to such a thing are worthy of consideration.

Indeed, trying to explain Christian morality 'in terms of an interest Life has' is exactly the position that Nietzsche adopts throughout *GM,* III and it motivates his psychological reading of the apparently life-denying character types in that essay.[19] At the very start of *GM,* III Nietzsche speaks of the '*horror vacui*' as the 'basic fact' of the human will. His point is that, contra Schopenhauer, there is no will-less state for humans, in the quasi-Schopenhauerian sense of an affirmative, Life-based will. Ascetic philosophers, for example, including Schopenhauer himself, deny company, marriage, and social bonds, which makes them *seem* anti-natural or anti-Life; but this is not *really* anti-Life because absence of company, marriage, and so on are (Nietzsche claims) the *best life-affirming option available* for these kinds of people. The philosopher who is drawn to asceticism 'does not deny "existence"…, but rather affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence' (*GM,* III, 7; generally, see *GM,* III, 6–10). Similarly for the ascetic priest who treats 'nature' or 'the world' like a 'wrong path' or 'mistake' (*GM,* III 11). This *appears* to be 'life *against* life'. But, just because it appears this way, things cannot be as they appear: 'it can *only* be apparent'; 'life itself *must* have an interest' (*GM,* III, 13, emphasis added; *GM,* III, 11, emphasis added). And so it turns out: the ascetic priest, 'this negating one,—he actually belongs to the really great *conserving* and *yes-creating* forces of life'; 'his "no" that he says to life brings forth a wealth of tenderer Yesses' (*GM,* III, 13). This is the strategy that lies behind *GM,* III's conclusion: the ascetic's willing nothingness is, in one sense, 'a rebellion against the most fundamental prerequisites of life, but'—Nietzsche immediately adds—'it is and remains a *will*!' In other words, as we have seen: even in apparent rebellion

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[19] For a detailed description of how *GM* tries to explain Christian morality 'in terms of an interest Life has', see Stern (2020: 30–45).

against its preconditions, Life is still promoting itself.[20] The reason why Life 'must have an interest' is that Life *always* has an interest.[21]

These quotations might suggest that Life, according to Nietzsche, is what we might call 'omnipotent': Life *always* values through us to achieve its ends as best it can, such that there is no Life-independent valuation. This theoretical background is most strongly in evidence in *GM,* III 6–10, in the aforementioned passages about the ascetic philosopher. There, Nietzsche argues that philosophers who appear anti-Life are not in fact anti-Life, because *no animal can be anti-Life*, because the examination of *every animal* reveals Life doing the best it can under the circumstances (*GM,* III 7). The point of this is not merely to establish *that* Nietzsche (sometimes, especially in *GM,* III 6–10) commits himself to this 'omnipotent' view. The point is to show why. Without it, one would not have grounds to interpret apparent life-deniers as Nietzsche does, namely as *only apparent* life-deniers who require further explanation precisely because they *cannot* be as they appear to be, namely a sort of natural or biological contradiction in terms. It is unclear how *GM,* III could progress without an underlying assumption of this kind, even if it is not Nietzsche's dominant view.

Yet such a view would have unwanted consequences for Nietzsche. First, it would lead to problematic apathy on the part of the would-be affirmer: 'thankfully,' she might say, 'it turns out that, whatever I do, I'll be affirming life; so I don't really need to worry about it.' This is obviously not a position that Nietzsche would explicitly endorse. He shows himself aware of the apathy problem in his discussion of those (for him) false nature-moralists, namely the Stoics: 'supposing your imperative "live according to nature" meant at bottom as much as "live according to life"—how could you not do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be' (*BGE,* 9; also *KSA,* 12, 574)? Moreover, Nietzsche's history of morality, especially its critical component, is often and quite plausibly understood to depend upon the notion that the West has taken a sort of 'wrong turn' in its values: we, or at least some of us, *could* have been more affirmative in some sense (more masterly, or less 'Christian', more natural), but the priestly, ascetic, anti-natural morality has taken hold instead where it wasn't needed, sapping our health (this is a plausible reading of e.g. *A,* 6, 7, 59, 60; *GM,* III 14, 21; *EH,* 'Destiny', 7–8; *WP,* 41; *KSA,* 12, 506). Somewhere along the line, at least some of us have taken a 'wrong turn' or, as one of his notes has it, some have been 'led

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[20] Pippin (2006: 142) evidently takes Nietzsche's description of life turning against life to count against views like mine, which have Nietzsche positing life as an underlying criterion of value. I hope this account clears up the confusion: *apparent* life-against-life should attract our attention, Nietzsche thinks, precisely *because* life is the underlying criterion of value.

[21] It is important to keep Nietzsche's strategy in mind. May (2011) bases his interpretation on the thought that any weighing up of life's pros and cons would just be a 'vainglorious fiction dreamed up by the will to nothingness'. But, as we can see, the will to nothingness, itself, is a life-promoting strategy on the part of Life. Viewed in that context, the problem is not, as May has it, how one could affirm, but rather how one could *fail* to affirm.

astray' (*irregeleitet*) (*KSA*, 12, 506). This isn't just the claim that some of us have been forced by external circumstances to take a generally less preferable, but, under current less-than-ideal circumstances, still *most* life-promoting path. Rather, it is the claim that some who certainly *could* have taken a more preferable path have nonetheless gone astray. A further claim would be that Nietzsche encourages (some) readers to put this 'right'. The problematic question is: How is it possible for some people to have failed to choose natural affirmation? Or: how can we coherently characterize those who have taken the wrong turn?

The most promising way to do so entails a revision of the omnipotent view. Let us say that it is not the case that Life *always* values through us to achieve its ends as best it can. There is textual evidence to support a version of this, notably in Nietzsche's language of sick, weary, declining, or decrepit Life (*TI*, 'Morality', 5; *GM*, III, 13) as that which underwrites Life-denying values. Following this line, the life-psychology argument indeed reveals a 'Life' at work in the life-denier, but it is a sickly Life—either one that is failing to achieve what it wants to achieve as best it can or one whose very goals are sickly or misguided. In effect, Nietzsche would be suggesting that our valuations proceed either from healthy or from sick Life and he would be asking us to promote the former against the latter. This is probably the most prominent line of argument in his late works though, as I have said, the omnipotent view is also present.

But this division of Life into healthy and sick, or ascending and declining (and so on), creates its own problem. It entails a cleft between me and healthy Life such that my activity can impede healthy Life's aims and, perhaps, I am in some position to assist or resist. Thus, I *can* form valuations or take actions with some minimal degree of independence from (healthy) Life, even if only because I am being controlled by sickly Life. To be clear: I am not suggesting that *no* instance of apparent life-denial is the expression of Life itself, working at its best. My point is that, for good reason, and despite some of his claims to the contrary, Nietzsche himself cannot hold that *all* life-denial is the expression of healthy Life working at its best. But once he has claimed, as he often does, that life-denial is the expression of sick or malfunctioning Life, he owes us an account of why being guided by a sick or malfunctioning Life is *objectionable*. And this was exactly the first problem, discussed in the previous section: Nietzsche struggles to find a good answer, for the reasons we have seen. To repeat what was said there, being 'unhealthy' in Nietzsche's sense is not obviously bad, whatever the words 'unhealthy' or 'declining' might have us believe.

In an effort to deal with this problem, Richardson attempts reconciliation in the following way. Life is always promoting its own ends at the deepest level. By 'depth', what he means is that Life 'inescapably and basically' (2013: 772–3) accounts for all motivations and valuations, by setting up the goal to which other valuations aim. But, in humans, Life is represented by an implicit, 'underlying will' which is prone to error as to the means to achieve this valuation and

'Nietzsche appeals to us to side with this underlying will and to free it of the errors that make [Christian] morality appealing to it' (2013: 775; generally 2013: 773–7). You already *are* committed to Life's ends at the deepest level at which you can value, so you are not independent; still, you are trying to achieve these already-chosen ends inefficiently.

But this does not, in the end, resolve things. Compare Richardson's Nietzsche with Schopenhauer: for both, 'Life' is the deepest source of everyday human evaluation; for both, the means to achieve Life's ends occasionally go wrong, leading to lives which are not in line with Life's deepest values; for both, their philosophies reveal this 'wrong path'. 'Hurrah for heroic resistance, turning Life's powers against Life's ends!' says Schopenhauer. 'Boo to life-denial!' says Richardson's Nietzsche. How do we choose? Richardson supposes that 'the decision will favour the underlying will' because the individual mistakenly chose the wrong path while committing, deeply, to Life's ends (2013: 775). But it does not follow that the *telos* of the now-wayward process is the one to which I ought to or will return. As in Schopenhauer, I may now be alienated from the first or 'deep' goal, just as those convinced of Darwin's theories might nonetheless be alienated from the goal of maximally efficient gene-reproduction (and so on). So imagine the Christian or Schopenhauerian responds as follows: 'Let us agree that, deep down, I set out to further Life's ends and that Life still operates through me; let us agree, too, that Life is dominance, violence, and exploitation. But we also agree that I strayed, that I am inhibiting Life's ends (to avoid the apathy problem) and hence resistance is not *futile* (there has indeed been a 'wrong turn'); and we agree that resistance is not *fatal* (Christians live, sometimes live longer). By your own standards, you cannot appeal to Life's values as *good* or *true* or *comfortable* (see the first problem, above). However I ended up here, I don't want to go back to pursuing Life's values as efficiently as possible. If I must pursue them, I choose to pursue them inefficiently using the resistance we agree is effective to some degree.

To bring this abstract dilemma into sharper focus, we might refer back to that example from Nietzsche's notes, where he repeatedly tries out the idea that a forced sterilization programme targeting the sick would be natural and life-affirming on the grounds that society would be doing Life's work in getting rid of those 'botched' (human) organisms which Life ought to have excluded, but failed to (*KSA,* 13, 401, 599–600, 611–12; see also *A,* 2; *TI,* 'Skirmishes', 36). The point is not that Richardson and I make opposing quasi-empirical predictions about what this Schopenhauerian would do—force-sterilize the sick (life-affirming) or not (life-denying). The point is rather that Nietzsche leaves himself with no clear means to make any case against the Schopenhauerian. Bluntly, when we put the first and second problems together we find the following dilemma: either we *can't fail* to affirm naturally or, if we *can* fail, Nietzsche can give no good reason why we shouldn't.

Earlier, I suggested that Nietzsche tries to link natural and total affirmation, and that this could make room for a more convincing account of how we are to

affirm suffering. This linkage relied on the thought that all that happens is natural in such a way that affirming nature entails total affirmation. But this second problem, now fully explained, undermines precisely that connection. If *all* that happens is 'natural' in such a way that affirming nature entails total affirmation, then, as we have seen, the 'wrong turn' is rendered impossible. And, of course, if *not* all that happens is natural, then we are sent back to the problem of how to affirm (totally) the non-natural. In addition to the first two problems, then, we are faced again with a clash between natural and total affirmation. This amounts to a central problem for Nietzsche, which I cannot see him resolving.

7.   The Changing Nature of Nietzschean Affirmation

The analysis I have offered of late Nietzschean affirmation is true to his texts of that period, as are the objections I have presented. Why might we have been slow to recognize this? It cannot, as we have seen, be due to a lack of evidence in Nietzsche's texts: that evidence is overwhelming both in quality and quantity. Part of the answer, I am sure, lies in the practice of so-called 'charitable' reading, where a flaw in some philosopher's ideas can too easily be converted into a perceived flaw in the *interpretation* of those ideas (see Stern 2016 for a detailed analysis). But in this case there is another reason.

   Those familiar with earlier texts—and especially those who are not used to looking at the ways in which his ideas change over time—may wonder why there has been little discussion of affirmation as it applies to specific, great, creative individuals. What of the Nietzsche of self-creation, of learning from artists, of turning one's life into a work of art? Natural affirmation, as I have presented it, places the emphasis not on the creative projects of individuals, but on the values Nietzsche claims to find in nature. The question is whether or not we promote those natural values. Individuals, even great ones, do not *create* the natural values, any more than Schopenhauerian individuals create the Will's goals. They are there to be found, like it or not. As we have seen, one might imagine some room for manoeuvre within the confines of natural morality: the Dionysian Greeks and the Ancient Israelites had natural, but not identical moralities. Nonetheless, in the late Nietzsche, nature provides the final criteria for judging whether or not someone is affirmative. The late 'revaluation' (*Umwerthung*) of all values is a reversing, a flipping-*back*, a making-natural-again of all values, not a completely free creation. This does not mean that we adopt the specific moral and religious codes of Ancient Greeks or Ancient Israelites, but it does mean that our morality ought to be natural, like theirs were. It is unsurprising, therefore, that *TI* analyses Caesar and Napoleon in terms of the different ways in which their natural instincts prevail.[22]

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[22] See Stern (2009) for discussion.

Readings which give a more individualistic emphasis to Nietzsche's affirmative ethics tend to lean on earlier texts, notably *GS,* I–IV, where such readings find good support. This is understandable with respect to those texts, but it is of course unfortunate if we do not appreciate and acknowledge what happens next. It is the blending of the middle and late Nietzsche's views which in part accounts for the reluctance to recognize the role of natural affirmation. The aim of this section is not to give a full or consistent account of Nietzschean affirmation in *GS,*[23] but merely to mark out the divisions between it and the texts under discussion here— those from 1886 onwards, and especially from 1887 onwards.

For *GS,* I–IV exhibits a completely different attitude to three key points: nature, health, and beauty. In the fourth book, in which the (total) affirmative ideas of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence make their first appearances, Nietzsche claims that all values—including 'affirmation and negations'—in the world are placed there by us, but we fail to realize it. As his metaphor goes, we mistakenly think that we are the spectators at life's play; in fact, we ('higher ones') are the poets. A key premise for this mode of thinking, as Nietzsche realizes, is that nature itself can make *no normative claim on us*. And that, indeed, is precisely what he says: '*die Natur ist immer Wertlos*' (*GS,* 301). This is evidently a significant change from the 'natural values' (*Natur-Werthe*) espoused in the later works, as in *A*, above. We find this change mirrored in Nietzsche's account of health. Health, like nature, is general in the later works, relating to the proper functioning of nature's norma-tive force: this is what establishes that some are healthier than others. But just as *GS,* 301 denies natural values, so *GS,* 120 denies *any* general conception of 'health' for humans as a whole claiming, first, that the term should merely be relative to an individual's goal and, second, that even so it might be good to be unhealthy.

Finally, *GS* indeed promotes an artistic, creative, and falsifying mode of affirm-ation which looks to beauty as an independent value, rather than to the nature-based affirmation of the later works (*GS,* 107, 276, 290, 299). But beauty in the later Nietzsche is not independent of his nature-morality: beauty and ugliness relate necessarily to our natural self-affirmation; beauty is the affirmation of health; ugliness is disgust at degeneration (*TI,* 'Skirmishes', 19–20). Consequently, beautification in later Nietzsche means trying to express the deepest need of the species. It is derived from natural values whereas in *GS*, as we have seen, there simply are no natural values.

Let us be clear. It is quite a significant philosophical question whether or not nature is the ultimate source of values. We would probably expect the answer given by a philosopher to impact on how we interpret his ethics. *GS* says nature isn't a source of values (and that there is no 'health' for humans as a whole), pre-ferring something like beautification as the route to affirmation; the later works say that nature is a source of values at the most profound level, that we ought to

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[23] I give a fuller though by no means complete discussion of *GS*'s affirmation in Stern (2013) and of affirmation in the middle works in general in Stern (2019a).

be healthy and that beauty is a function of natural valuation. It would be very surprising if the concept of affirmation, as a prime ethical objective, remained constant throughout a period in which there was such a significant shift in Nietzsche's basic ethical orientation.

8. Conclusion

For most readers of Nietzsche's works of the period, I take it that ascribing to him the following views ought not to be controversial. First, there's something wrong with 'Christianity': it is anti-natural. Second, not all the adherents of Christian morality must be its adherents: some could be more affirmative. Third, the affirmation of all that is and has been ('total affirmation') is to be encouraged. I have analysed what I take to be a very significant strand of affirmation in the later Nietzsche; each problem I have presented may be targeted at (at least) one of these significant and exegetically plausible claims. The first problem shows that Nietzsche finds it difficult to give a good account of what is *wrong* with being anti-natural. This threatens the first claim. The second problem reveals a tension between the first and second claims. Nietzsche criticizes Christianity via his life-psychology: Life values through us when we value, so purported anti-life values are peculiar. Yet, as we have seen, this threatens the stability of his picture. If Life always guarantees that we are as affirmative towards life as we can be under the circumstances, then Nietzsche's second claim is undermined. On the other hand, if Life does not always make that guarantee, then the second claim is true, but space is left for values which genuinely and independently oppose Life to play their part, and the life-psychology argument against Christianity fails. This, in turn, threatens the first claim, in that Christianity may be anti-natural, but Nietzsche allows for no convincing account of what is wrong with that. Finally, as we have seen, the natural affirmation that is evidently supported by Nietzsche in his criticism of anti-natural morality stands in tension with the third claim: the endorsement of total affirmation.

I began by saying that affirmation is the pinnacle of Nietzsche's ethics. The point of this discussion has been to elaborate how affirmation works in the later Nietzsche, but also to explain how and why it sets up conflicts within his philosophical outlook. Taking this philosopher seriously does not mean showing that he is right by any means possible, including ignoring his philosophical claims and commitments. Instead, I hope to have shown some of the obstacles facing the sympathetic interpreter who wants to treat Nietzsche's affirmative efforts carefully on his own terms.[24]

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