

# Nietzschean Constructivism: Ethics and Metaethics for All and None

Silk, Alex

DOI:

[10.1080/0020174X.2013.878666](https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.878666)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Silk, A 2015, 'Nietzschean Constructivism: Ethics and Metaethics for All and None', *Inquiry*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 244-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.878666>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

## **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article first published by Taylor & Francis in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* on 18th February 2014, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/0020174X.2013.878666>

Checked July 2015

## **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

## **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

# Nietzschean Constructivism: Ethics and Metaethics for All and None<sup>\*</sup>

Alex Silk  
a.silk@bham.ac.uk

Penultimate draft. Please consult the official version in *Inquiry*,  
special issue on Nietzsche's moral psychology.

## Abstract

This paper develops an interpretation of Nietzsche's ethics and metaethics that reconciles his apparent antirealism with his engagement in normative discourse. Interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist — as holding, to a first approximation, that evaluative facts are grounded purely in facts about the evaluative attitudes of the creatures to whom they apply — reconciles his vehement declarations that nothing is valuable in itself with his passionate expressions of a particular evaluative perspective and injunctions for the free spirits to create new values. Drawing on Nietzsche's broader epistemological and psychological views, I develop a distinctive, and genuinely Nietzschean, version of constructivism. On this account, evaluative properties are grounded in affective valuations of the new philosophers. The proposed interpretation synthesizes a variety of disparate features of Nietzsche's writings and improves on existing interpretations in the literature. The resulting version of constructivism is also worthy of attention in contemporary theorizing. The fruits of understanding the distinctive form of Nietzsche's ethical theory is an illuminating example of how metanormative inquiry can undergird normative evaluation in practice.

---

<sup>\*</sup>Thanks to Brian Leiter, Peter Railton, John Richardson, and two anonymous referees from *Inquiry* for helpful discussion and comments on earlier drafts.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The puzzle</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Nietzschean constructivism: The basics</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	Metaethical constructivism: What? . . . . .	7
3.2	The core puzzle: A constructivist solution . . . . .	10
<b>4</b>	<b>Nietzschean constructivism: The details</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1	Epistemic constraints on value creation . . . . .	13
4.2	Affects and evaluative attitudes . . . . .	19
<b>5</b>	<b>Value creation and evaluative attitudes</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>30</b>

# 1 Introduction

There is something puzzling when the same person who writes:

We have thought the matter over and finally decided that there is nothing good, nothing beautiful, nothing sublime, nothing evil in itself, but that there are states of soul in which we impose such words upon things external to and within us. (D 210)<sup>1</sup>

also — in the same book even! — writes:

It goes without saying that I do not deny — unless I am a fool — that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged. (D 103)

One might not expect the same philosopher to say that “nature is always value-less” (GS 301) and also declaim that those who posit an ideal world “rob reality of its meaning, *value*, and truthfulness” (EH P:2; emphasis mine) — or, more colorfully, that the Christian church is “the highest of all conceivable corruptions” and “has turned every value into an un-value, every truth into a lie, every integrity into a vileness of the soul” (A 62).

Yes, the title gave it away: I am talking about Nietzsche, one of history’s most vehement critics — of, well, just about everything — and antirealist *par excellence*. The puzzle: On the one hand, Nietzsche makes claims to the effect that there are no evaluative facts (consider: “error theorist,” “nihilist”); but on the other hand, he ardently engages in evaluative discourse and recommends an evaluative perspective. The task: Improve our understanding of Nietzsche’s views on the nature of value and

---

<sup>1</sup>I use the following standard acronyms when citing Nietzsche’s texts: *The Antichrist* (A); *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE); *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT); *The Case of Wagner* (CW); *Daybreak* (D); *Ecce Homo* (EH); *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM); *The Gay Science* (GS); *Human, All Too Human* (HH); *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (NCW); *Twilight of the Idols* (TI); *Untimely Meditations* (UM); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z). I cite *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, incorporated as Part II of Volume II of HH, as WS. I use Roman numerals to refer to major parts and chapters (if there are any), and Arabic numerals to refer to sections. Regarding Nietzsche’s *Nachlass*, if a note is included in *The Will to Power* (as decided by later editors), I cite it as WP. If it is not included, I cite it by the volume, notebook number, and note number in COLLI & MONTINARI 1980 (KSA). I include the year for all notes. I use material from the notebooks principally as supporting and clarifying ideas found in Nietzsche’s published works. (See MAGNUS 1988 for the standard case against relying on the notebooks.)

the practice of valuing to help make sense of these *prima facie* incongruous aspects of his normative and metanormative stance.<sup>2</sup>

I am not the first person to notice this interpretive puzzle, or at least one like it, in Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup> But I am not satisfied with existing treatments. In this paper I will develop an interpretation of Nietzsche's ethics and metaethics that (hopefully!) offers an improved solution. I will argue that interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist — as holding, to a first approximation, that evaluative facts are grounded purely in facts about the evaluative attitudes of the creatures to whom they apply — can render intelligible his equally fervent injunctions that nothing is valuable “in itself,” on the one hand, and endorsements of particular values, on the other. This interpretation synthesizes a variety of disparate features of Nietzsche's writings, including his perspectivism, his occasional preference for ardent rhetoric over regimented argumentation, his project of the “revaluation of all values,” and the connection between the threat of practical nihilism and the creation of values. The resulting normative and metanormative viewpoint is not only coherent — it would not be uncharitable to attribute it to a person of Nietzsche's acuity and pedigree — but also worthy of consideration in contemporary theorizing. It is a view that certainly *might* be defended, at least in its central features even if not in all its details. The fruits of understanding the distinctive form of Nietzsche's ethics is a compelling example of how metanormative inquiry can undergird normative evaluation in practice.

Before beginning our investigation, a word of interpretive caution is in order. To a certain extent one can barely take oneself seriously when talking about “metaethics” in the history of philosophy, especially when ascribing a particular metaethical view, as if it were in some sense “his,” to someone as notoriously critical of interpretations of oneself and others as Nietzsche. Interpreting Nietzsche is difficult enough as it is given, among other things, his penchant for rhetorical excesses, the aphoristic and literary style of some of his works, his deliberate efforts to conceal his meaning from readers he deems unworthy or unprepared, and his own warnings about how particular claims of his must be understood in the context of his entire body of work

---

<sup>2</sup>A distinction is sometimes made between deontic terms (‘ought’, ‘must’, ‘reason’) and evaluative terms (‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘beautiful’). It is not uncontroversial how these families of terms are related, either in general or for Nietzsche. I will use ‘normative’ broadly to cover terms in both families; and though I often couch the discussion in terms of specifically evaluative notions and claims, the points apply to deontic notions and claims as well. No harm will come from this since Nietzsche's apparently nihilistic metanormative claims are about both types of terms, and his positive substantive claims use both types of terms.

<sup>3</sup>See WILCOX 1974: 2–3; RICHARDSON 1996: 143, 2004: 68, 105–106, 113–114; LEITER 2000: 277, 2002: 136–137, 161–163; CLARK & DUDRICK 2007: 193–194; HUSSAIN 2007: 157–165, 2011: 12–13, 2012a: 101; WALLACE 2007: 135; KATSAFANAS 2011: 624; JANAWAY & ROBERTSON 2012a: 10–11.

(e.g., GM P:8). Add to this the fact that metaethics did not even begin to come into its own until the mid-20th century, with there still being a lack of consensus even on how to formulate certain classic questions and positions, and one may feel tempted to despair of the possibility of our interpretive enterprise before we even begin.

Some interpreters have indeed come to such a conclusion.<sup>4</sup> But I am more optimistic. Of course Nietzsche did not present his views in quite the terms or with quite the systematicity that characterizes the presentation in this paper. But I hope to show that by ascribing the proposed views to Nietzsche we can make better sense of the character and content of his writings than we otherwise would. Some breadth of discussion will be required. Attending to the relevant range of issues will help us appreciate the complexity and synthesis of Nietzsche's views. At minimum, perhaps we can delineate an interesting normative and metanormative perspective, one worthy of attention in its own right.

Roadmap: After laying out our interpretive puzzle in greater detail (§2), I will show how interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist can help solve it (§3). Drawing on Nietzsche's broader epistemological and psychological views, I will then develop this Nietzschean version of constructivism in greater detail (§4). Particular attention will be paid to the nature and source of the attitudes that are treated as grounding the existence of values. The resulting (non-Kantian) version of constructivism represents a distinctive position in contemporary metaethics which improves upon shortcomings of similar accounts. Finally, to help clarify the connection, for Nietzsche, between values, evaluative attitudes, and evaluative judgments, I will address several alternative subjectivist realist, non-cognitivist, and fictionalist interpretations (§5). As we will see, interpretations like the one I am proposing have not received due consideration in the literature. A more nuanced understanding of the space of metaethical possibilities can help throw into relief a more plausible normative and metanormative view we can attribute to Nietzsche.

## 2 The puzzle

Some of Nietzsche's claims about value can appear puzzling when seen alongside his expressions of his own values. Let's make this appearance more concrete.

First, a persistent theme throughout Nietzsche's writings is that nothing has value in itself and that, consequently, all evaluative judgments necessarily involve a kind of error. Though Nietzsche often focuses his attacks on specifically moral

---

<sup>4</sup>E.g., WILCOX 1974: 201; REGINSTER 2006: 100; HUSSAIN 2011: 12, 52–53.

properties and claims,<sup>5</sup> his critiques, even throughout his mature period, seem to extend to all normative and evaluative properties and claims. In addition to D 210 and GS 301 (see §1), consider:<sup>6</sup>

What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are! (GS 299)

[T]o demand that our human interpretations and values should be universal and perhaps constitutive values [somehow inhering in the nature of the world independent of human beings] is one of the hereditary madneses of human pride. (WP 565 [1886])

These passages might be taken to suggest an error theory: *prima facie*, we have a metaphysical claim about how the world is, and an associated semantic claim about the truth values of evaluative sentences. But let's refrain from applying contemporary labels for the moment and just focus on the claims themselves. Any interpretation must account for Nietzsche's persistent claims that nothing has value "in itself."

Second, as a counterpoint to these apparently "nihilistic" claims, Nietzsche expresses his own evaluative views and even calls for the "creation" of new values. One of Nietzsche's primary concerns is what he calls the *revaluation of values*. The negative part of this project, the critique of morality, is well known (if not always well understood). But Nietzsche's positive injunction for the "philosophers of the future" to fill the evaluative void and create new values — new life-affirming values that express the "ultimate, most joyous, most wantonly extravagant Yes to life" (EH BT:2) — is just as important, perhaps more important, to his overall vision.

Though Nietzsche dissects our values and evaluative practices as theorist, he also engages in normative discourse. *On the Genealogy of Morality* is subtitled "A Polemic." Central to Nietzsche's critique of morality is a distinction between "higher" and "lower" types of people. Nietzsche critiques morality, "but why? *Out of morality!* Or what else should we call that which informs it — and *us?*... But there is no doubt that a 'thou shalt' still speaks to us too, that we too still obey a stern law set over us (D P:4). Though "[f]ree of morality," "when the conscious mind has attained its highest degree of freedom it is involuntarily led to" "the individual virtues, moderation, justice, repose of soul" (WS 212). To use one of his favorite contrasts, though Nietzsche is "Beyond Good and Evil. — At least this does not mean 'Beyond Good and Bad'" (GM I:17). Not all evaluative judgments are treated on a par, for Nietzsche.

---

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., HH 4; D 103; BGE 108; CW E; TI VII:1; WP 428 [1888].

<sup>6</sup>See also HH P:6, 32–33; D 3; GS 115; Z I:12,15, II:12; BGE P; TI II:2; A 11; WP 12 [1888], 25 [1887], 789 [1885–1886].

He not only takes up a particular normative perspective himself, but also regards it as, in some sense, warranted or fitting, and disagrees with individuals who accept a contrary alternative: Christian morality “reverse[s]” “the concepts of ‘true’ and ‘false’...: whatever is most harmful to life is called ‘true’; whatever elevates it, enhances, affirms, justifies it, makes it triumphant, is called ‘false’” (A 9). Apparently, Nietzsche regards some values as having genuine normative force.<sup>7</sup>

But whence this normative force? One of Nietzsche’s favored metaphors — metaphors? — is to treat these genuine values as *created*. It is the task of the “new philosophers,” the “philosophers of the future” (BGE 42, 44, 203) — as heralded by the “higher types” (BGE 62; A 4; EH III:1, IV:4) and “free spirits” (GS 347; BGE ch. 2) — to be “creators... who write new values on new tablets” (Z P:9).<sup>8</sup> “[W]hat is good and evil *no one knows yet*, unless it be he who creates. He, however, creates man’s goal and gives the earth its meaning and its future. That anything at all is good and evil — that is his creation” (Z III:12.2). Similarly: “He who *determines* values and directs the will of millennia by giving direction to the highest natures is the *highest man*” (WP 999 [1884]); he is “*value-creating*” (BGE 260).<sup>9</sup> What is special about the new philosophers is not simply that new things come to serve as the objects of their evaluative attitudes. If people began valuing things that harmed the higher types in new ways and prevented the achievement of human flourishing and excellence, Nietzsche would not be quite so enthusiastic. Rather, Nietzsche is suggesting that the new philosophers can, and must, create new *genuine* values: values that make legitimate claims on us and afford a critical, authoritative perspective on how to act, feel, and be. It is this that distinguishes the revaluation of values of the new philosophers from the revaluation of values of the slaves in the slave revolt (GM I).

<sup>7</sup>See also, among many others, D 103, 104, 556; GS 290, 335; BGE 23, 44, 56, 187, 202, 225, 257, 259, 262, 284, 293; GM P:3,5,6, I:12, II:2; A 2, 9, 11, 57, 62; TI V:4,6, IX:35; EH IV:4,7,8; WP 250 [1887], 382 [1887, 1888], 674 [1887–1888], 858 [1888]. Though Nietzsche sometimes treats certain evaluative questions as matters of “taste” (GS 132, 184; Z III:11.2; WP 353 [1887–1888]), he treats taste itself as rational and capable of genuine insight into reality, often even as more reliable than reflection (PTG 3; GS 132, 184, 301, 344, 377, 381; Z II:13; BGE 5, 43, 230; CW 7, 10; EH II:8). For our purposes we can bracket the contentious question of what, if anything, Nietzsche took to be the primary locus of non-instrumental value — e.g., power, freedom, creativity, valuing, flourishing, excellence. See, e.g., LEITER 2002, ROBERTSON 2012 for discussion of the “scope problem,” the problem of delimiting Nietzsche’s critical target so as to make room for his endorsements of a positive ideal.

<sup>8</sup>It is not always transparent how Nietzsche understands the relation between these categories of individuals. For consistency, I will say that it is the *free spirits* that Nietzsche enjoins to create new values, and that it is the *new philosophers*, a subclass of free spirits and higher types, that actually create such new values.

<sup>9</sup>See also GW VI: 336 [1873]; GS 55, 290, 320, 335, 347; Z I:1, I:8, I:17, II:2, II:12, III:11, III.12.16; BGE 203, 211; A 11, 13; EH IV:1; WP 260 [1883–1888], 972 [1884], 979 [1885].



Though Nietzsche's claims about value creation are in *prima facie* tension with his apparently systematic attributions of falsity to evaluative judgments — hence the puzzle — it is important to see that Nietzsche himself regards them as related. The broader contexts of certain of the apparently error-theoretic passages above are illuminating in this regard. Reconsider GS 301 (see also Z I:15):

It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually *make* something that is not yet there: the whole perpetually growing world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations... Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature — nature is always value-less — but has rather been given, granted value, and *we* were the givers and granters! Only we have created the world *that concerns human beings!*

In a manner to be explained, certain things, for Nietzsche, *do* have value — though not “in themselves” — and it is somehow human beings who are responsible for this. This point will be crucial in our interpretation.

Although it is human beings who have somehow conferred value on things, not just any human beings and not just any values will do. Nietzsche took there to be *epistemic constraints* on value creation. It is a measure of strength or greatness how much “terrible insight into reality” (EH Z:6) one can bear and affirm: “Error... is not blindness, error is *cowardice*” (EH P:3). Nietzsche's higher type “conceives reality *as it is*, being strong enough to do so” (EH IV:5). In a section titled “*Intellectual conscience*,” Nietzsche warns against having and living according to beliefs “*without* first becoming aware of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling [oneself] about such reasons afterwards”; it is “the desire for certainty... which separates the higher human beings from the lower!” (GS 2).<sup>10</sup>

How can one satisfy this “intellectual conscience” in the creation of values? The new philosopher's values must be informed by, or at least consistent with, sensory evidence and the sciences — in particular, the truths gleaned by genealogy concern-

---

<sup>10</sup>See also BT SC 7; WS 44; D 45, 479; GS P:3, 11, 88, 110, 123, 283–284, 290, 335; Z II:22.2, IV:15; BGE 30, 39, 227–230; GM I:10,13, II:24, III:12; TI X:2; A 50, 54; EH BT:2, IV:1, IV:3; WP 172 [1887], 1041 [1888]. See WILCOX 1974; RICHARDSON 1996, 2004; HUSSAIN 2007 for further discussion. Though Nietzsche grants that having false beliefs can sometimes be necessary for preserving and promoting one's life and the species (e.g., UM II:I; GS 111, 121; BGE 4, 11, 34–35), his misgivings about the value of truth and knowledge are misgivings about their *unconditional* and *unquestioned* value. For instance, after claiming that what is needed for the preservation of the human race is “*virtuous stupidity*,” he notes that “there is certainly something to be said for the exception” — i.e., “the explorers of *truth* above all” — “*provided it never wants to become the rule*” (GS 76; cf. GM III:24–27).

ing the psychological, physiological, and biological origins and history of these values. The created values must also reflect the discipline of the scientific method. For example, they must be treated as partial and revisable; they must have “style” and unity; and, crucially, they must embody insights from many perspectives. Indeed, occupying different, possibly opposed points of view is a “precondition” for the new philosopher’s ultimate “task”: to “*create values*” (BGE 211).<sup>11</sup> Our interpretation must capture how these epistemic considerations constrain the process of value creation.

To recap, our interpretive puzzle is this. At the metanormative level, Nietzsche claims that nothing is valuable in itself and that normative judgment systematically involves a kind of error. But at the substantive normative level, Nietzsche engages in normative discourse and expresses his acceptance of a particular system of norms. Further, he enjoins the free spirits to create new values, something which would only make sense if he thought that the free spirits could ground the existence of genuine values, values which could make certain normative claims true. In short: Though (a) Nietzsche claims that nothing has value in itself, (b) he engages in normative discourse, endorsing certain values and rejecting others, and (c) calls for the new philosophers to create new values, (d) values that must meet certain conditions for them to have genuine normative force.

### 3 Nietzschean constructivism: The basics

By interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist we can capture these seemingly conflicting elements of his normative and metanormative position.

#### 3.1 Metaethical constructivism: What?

First, it will be helpful to say a bit about how I am understanding constructivism. The term ‘constructivism’ has been applied to a variety of alternative views, not all of which may count as constructivist in my sense. But let’s not get hung up on terminology; no use fetishizing ‘constructivism’. I will try to keep the introduction of terminology to a minimum and focus on the substance of the various claims.

---

<sup>11</sup>On genealogy: GS 335; GM P:5–6, I Note; EH BT:2, IV:1. On science and the senses: HH 3, 27, 244, 633, 635; D 195; Z II:2; BGE 134; TI III:1–3; A 13; WP 461 [1888], 1045 [1886–1887], 1046 [1884]. On partiality and revisability: D 51; GS 296, 381; BGE 42; A 54 (*cf.* KAUFMANN 1974: 63–72 on Nietzsche’s “experimentalism”). On occupying diverse perspectives: HH P:6; GS 335; BGE 284; GM III:12; EH I:1 — and then integrating them with style: D 119; GS 270, 290, 335; BGE 200, 212, 284; TI IX:49; WP 259 [1884], 928 [1887–1888], 966 [1884]. See also nn. 10, 17, 37.

Constructivism, as I am using the term, is a metaethical position about the nature of normative properties in general.<sup>12</sup> It is a metaphysical position about *what it is* to be good or bad, right or wrong, or a normative reason to do something. Thus constructivism does not merely make an extensionality claim about what has value, as expressible by a biconditional of the form “X is valuable iff...”. Nor does it simply make an epistemological claim about what probilifies normative truths, or a supervenience claim about what fixes normative truths. Rather, constructivism answers the following sorts of questions: Fundamentally, what, if anything, ultimately grounds (constitutes, determines) that something is non-instrumentally valuable? Or that something is a reason for someone to do something? Constructivism offers an answer to the question of what grounds normative facts, or of what fundamentally makes it the case that something is valuable, etc.

The notions of fundamentality and ground at play here are metaphysical ones; they are the same as those used in claims that Socrates is more fundamental than his singleton {Socrates}, that physical properties ground mental properties, etc. These notions are familiar, not only in recent discussions of metaphysical determination and dependence, but also, to some extent, in ordinary speech. Roughly, to say that one class of facts is grounded in another class of facts is to say that the former obtain in virtue of the latter, or that the latter depend on the former. To say that the solubility of a sugar cube is grounded in the arrangement of its molecules is to say that it is in virtue of, or because of, the arrangement of its molecules that the sugar cube counts as being soluble; that the sugar cube is soluble is neither a brute fact nor something “over and above” the facts about the sugar cube’s molecular constitution. Further, we commonly take some facts and properties be more fundamental than others. For instance, a central aim of normative ethical theory is to locate the most fundamental moral principles, if any there be. Telling Alice you will help her and then failing to do so may be wrong because it is a break of a promise, and acts of promise breaking may be wrong because they are prohibited by the set of optimific rules.

Despite the increased currency of these notions, I want to flag that it is not uncontentious precisely how they ought to be understood, or what role they ought to play in philosophical theorizing.<sup>13</sup> Though, for concreteness, I will couch the discussion in terms of the notion of ground, this is inessential. What is important for

---

<sup>12</sup>I will focus primarily on practical normative properties. I briefly address epistemic normative properties in §4.1.

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., SCHAFFER 2009, ROSEN 2010, FINE 2012, TROGDON 2013 for discussion. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify the operative notion of ground here and its relation to the characterization of naturalism below.

present purposes is that constructivism, as I am understanding it, constitutes a position in the familiar metaethical debates about the nature of normative properties, their reducibility to natural properties, and the like. Readers who prefer to understand these issues in other terms may feel free to recast the discussion accordingly (e.g., in terms of reduction, constitution, identity).

Constructivism, as I am understanding it, is a species of metaethical naturalism, the view that being valuable (e.g.) is grounded in being *N*, for some natural property *N*. Metaethical naturalists divide not only on the question of what natural property grounds the normative property in question, but also on the relation between this natural property, whatever it is, and agents' evaluative attitudes. That is, they divide on the question of whether facts about the actual or counterfactual evaluative attitudes of agents play an essential role in grounding the normative facts. Let's call this question the question of whether normative properties are *attitude-dependent*.

#### ATTITUDE-DEPENDENCE

Normative properties are ultimately grounded in properties of agents' evaluative attitudes (perhaps in conjunction with the non-normative facts about the relevant circumstances).

(Henceforth I will typically leave the qualifier concerning the relevant circumstances implicit. For the moment, by 'evaluative attitude' I mean any attitude that tends to motivate an agent when combined with her ordinary factual beliefs; thus not all evaluative attitudes in this sense need concern values. More on evaluative attitudes in §4.2.)

Metaethical constructivists accept that normative properties are attitude-dependent in this sense (more briefly, they "accept attitude-dependence"). Normative facts, on this view, are nothing "over and above" facts about agents' evaluative attitudes. What makes a normative judgment correct is that it coheres with the relevant agent's (/agents') evaluative attitudes, where constructivist theories may differ on what agent is (/class of agents are) "relevant" and what the relevant sense of "coherence" is.<sup>14</sup> Treating values as constructed out of agents' evaluative attitudes leaves room for how agents can be normatively mistaken, though only in certain ways. What an

---

<sup>14</sup>Thus I use 'constructivism' in a broader sense than Street (e.g., 2008: 224). For developments of metaethical constructivism, see especially STREET 2008, also her 2010b, 2012. See also KORSGAARD 1996, BAGNOLI 2002, VELLEMAN 2009, and LENMAN 2010, as well as the collection of papers in LENMAN & SHEMMER 2012. For critical discussions of various forms of constructivism, see, e.g., DARWALL ET AL. 1992: 137–144; WEDGWOOD 2002; SHAFER-LANDAU 2005: ch. 2; HUSSAIN & SHAH 2006; ENOCH 2009.

agent values and what is genuinely valuable for her can come apart, but only if she is mistaken about properties of the relevant evaluative attitudes, or perhaps about the non-normative facts.

Note that this characterization of constructivism leaves open whether any normative facts are universal, or apply to all agents. So-called Kantian versions of constructivism accept that some reasons or values are universal (KORSGAARD 1996), whereas Humean versions deny this (STREET 2012). (More on this in §4.1.) Though some positions in the Kantian tradition may presuppose notions of reasonableness or agency that are incompatible with Nietzsche's broader views, I will bracket those features in what follows.

### 3.2 The core puzzle: A constructivist solution

Treating Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist in this sense can help us respond to our interpretive puzzle.

First, we can make sense of Nietzsche's claims that nothing is valuable *in itself*, i.e., independent of agents' attitudes. Constructivism denies that normative properties are irreducible to natural properties and that they inhere in the nature of the world independently of human evaluative attitudes. The constructivist wholeheartedly agrees that values do not "constitute the essence and heart of things" (HH 4), that they are not "eternal and unconditioned" (GS 115), and so on. Treating Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist is thus consistent with his general naturalistic stance.

Second, despite denying that there are attitude-independent or irreducible normative properties, the constructivist affirms that there are normative properties all the same. Attitude-dependent properties are not second-rate as properties. If we interpret Nietzsche as accepting attitude-dependence, there is thus nothing curious about his emphatic engagement in normative discourse, his endorsements and rejections of various values, or his reliance on a distinction between "higher" and "lower" value systems and types of human beings. Even if there cannot be attitude-independent reasons for adopting one value over another, there can be genuine reasons all the same.

Third, the constructivist can give a precise interpretation of Nietzsche's claims that the new philosophers "create" values. The new philosophers create values not in the sense that they can invent or elicit new evaluative attitudes at will. This would be psychologically implausible and philosophically suspect: values exert genuine normative force; they govern the will (§§4–5). Rather, Nietzsche's talk of value creation can be understood metaphysically in terms of the thesis of attitude-dependence:

values are created by the new philosophers in the sense of being grounded in their evaluative attitudes. As we saw in §2, Nietzsche himself sometimes juxtaposes his denials of the independence of values with his affirmations that values depend for their existence and content on human evaluative attitudes. For example, in GS 301: “Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature — nature is always value-less” — i.e., there are no attitude-independent evaluative properties — “but has rather been given, granted value, and *we* were the givers and granters!” — i.e., there are values and they depend essentially for their existence on human evaluative attitudes. There is thus a real sense in which the new philosophers can create new values, values with genuine normative force.

We can further clarify this point by distinguishing two notions of value. On the one hand, ‘value’ can refer to a certain psychological state or attitude that is open to empirical study, or to the content of such a state or attitude. I will call values in this sense *values in the descriptive sense*. On the other hand, ‘value’ can refer to those values in the descriptive sense that make legitimate claims on us, or those which we ought to, or have reason to, have or promote (for some appropriate specification of ‘us’ and ‘we’). I will call values in this sense *values in the normative sense*, or *genuine values*. (My use of ‘value’ in either sense thus retains the ambiguity in whether it is the state of mind or its content that is being referred to. Making a distinction between values in the descriptive sense and values in the normative sense does not prejudice any questions concerning the relation between their extensions, or concerning the relation between normative and natural properties and concepts. It is thus consistent with this terminology to say that all and only values in descriptive sense are values in the normative sense, and to deny that evaluative properties are irreducibly normative or fundamental.) We can then put Nietzsche’s claim as follows: By coming to value new things in the descriptive sense, the new philosophers can thereby create new values in the normative sense.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Thanks to anonymous referees for pressing me to clarify the relevant sense of “creation” and the operative notions of value. There is an interpretive question of whether Nietzsche regards the normative distinction among values in the descriptive sense (i.e., the contents of individuals’ evaluative attitudes) as a binary one — one which distinguishes those that are “genuine” and those that are “non-genuine” — or rather as a gradable one — one which invokes a “rank order” among values that reflects their relative expression of, say, power, freedom, health, etc. Given our purposes I remain neutral on this question. Though I will often frame the discussion in terms of what makes it the case that certain values are “genuinely normative” for Nietzsche, sympathizers with the “rank order” interpretation may understand this as being about what grounds the value of the property that determines the rank ordering on values, and thus about what makes it the case that certain values are highest, or sufficiently high, in the rank order. What is important here is that constructivism constitutes an answer to either of these metaethical questions about the metaphysics, or grounds, of

Interpreting Nietzsche as a constructivist also gives new meaning to his occasional penchant for strong rhetoric (see SILK 2013a for further discussion). Given constructivism's claim that values are grounded in human evaluative attitudes, by changing the attitudes of his readers, Nietzsche may also change what normative facts hold of them, e.g., what is valuable for them, what their normative reasons for action are, and so on. As the free spirits come to endorse certain of Nietzsche's own values, such things may come to be genuinely valuable for them. Insofar as people can come to value certain things non-consciously (§4.2), Nietzsche can effect this change in their values, in both the descriptive and normative senses, without their even needing to realize it — hence his description of his books as “fish hooks” (EH BGE:1), perhaps. There is a benign sense in which this use of rhetoric is par for the course in philosophical ethics; it is commonplace to use “examples and a bit of tendentious rhetoric” (RAILTON 2010: 87) to draw one's audience into one's evaluative perspective and “pump their intuitions.” But given Nietzsche's metaethics, he can be treated as doing something much more radical — namely, changing the attitudes of the free spirits and, *by virtue of doing so*, also changing what normative facts hold of them.

In these ways, by interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist we can resolve the core aspects of our initial interpretive puzzle. We can reconcile his claims that nothing is valuable in itself with his engagement in normative discourse and his calls for the free spirits to create new genuine values. But there is still much more work to be done. At the moment, the constructivist position ascribed to Nietzsche is more of a schema than a full-fledged view. In the next section I will consider several ways of filling in the details of the proposal to form a genuinely Nietzschean version of constructivism, one that not only speaks to our initial puzzle but also integrates with Nietzsche's broader philosophical views.

## 4 Nietzschean constructivism: The details

According to constructivism, normative facts are grounded in facts about the evaluative attitudes of a certain class of agents. To fill in this constructivist schema we must specify two things: first, what the relevant class of agents is whose attitudes ground — or, we might say, comprise the *construction base* of — the normative properties in question; and, second, what types of attitudes comprise this construction base. In §4.1 I will argue that we can use Nietzsche's perspectivism to address the first question and capture the epistemic constraints on value creation discussed in

---

value. Thanks to John Richardson for helpful discussion.

§2. In §4.2 I will argue that we can use Nietzsche's views on the will, affects, and valuing to yield a new way of addressing the second question. The primary aim in this section is not to offer a full philosophical defense of the resulting constructivist view. It is rather, first, to delineate the central features, as well as the potential shortcomings, of Nietzschean constructivism; and, second, to elucidate a variety of ways in which the view may be developed, depending on one's views on certain further philosophical and interpretive issues. Nietzschean constructivism represents a distinctive *family* of metaethical theories. I welcome the development of alternative views and interpretations in this general family with which the present account may be compared.

#### 4.1 Epistemic constraints on value creation

It is well known that Nietzsche took the possibility and measure of knowledge to be crucially related to the essentially perspectival nature of experience: it is necessarily from a particular *affective perspective*, which directs our focus to certain features of things and hides others, that we perceive, judge, value, and so on. As interpreters have come to appreciate, at least in Nietzsche's mature period this perspectival character of experience is seen not as hindering us from grasping truths about the world, but rather as a condition for our doing so.<sup>16</sup> This point is made forcefully in the following famous passage from the *Genealogy*:<sup>17</sup>

“[O]bjectivity” [is to be] understood not as “contemplation without interest” (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability *to control* one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge... There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing;” and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity,” be. (GM III:12)

Knowledge is always interested and partial — there is no “view from nowhere.” Yet we can increase our knowledge of the objective features of things by examining them through a process of ruthless questioning and reversing of perspectives, affects, and interests. Nietzsche's perspectivism is often discussed concerning our knowledge of

---

<sup>16</sup>See WILCOX 1974, SCHACHT 1983, WESTPHAL 1984, CLARK 1990, LEITER 1994, RICHARDSON 1996, POELLNER 2001, JANAWAY 2007.

<sup>17</sup>See also HH P:6–7, 292; D 432; GS 51; Z III:12.16,19; BGE P, 22, 42, 211; GM I Note, III:12; EH I:1, Z:6; WP 259 [1884], 616 [1885–1886]; KSA 9.5[65] [1881].



the external world. I suggest that we can also appeal to Nietzsche's perspectivism in developing a distinctively Nietzschean normative epistemology and constructivist metaethic. Values are properties of one's own perspective, but not "merely" one's own perspective in any sense to be disparaged.

On one prominent way of developing constructivist theories in metaethics, what normative facts apply to an agent depends solely on facts about that agent's evaluative attitudes (e.g., STREET 2008). But Nietzsche appears to reject this, claiming that it is specifically the new philosophers, rather than human beings in general, that can create genuine values. It is "[t]he 'free' man, the possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will, [who] possesses his *measure of value*" (GM II:2); it is "the poet" who possesses "*vis creativa*, which the man of action lacks... It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually *make*" new values (GS 301).

We can appeal to Nietzsche's perspectivism and the epistemic constraints discussed in §2 to explain why he treats the attitudes of the new philosophers as metaphysically privileged in grounding evaluative properties. As we saw in §2, value judgments, for Nietzsche, can be judged based on the extent to which they are responsive to scientific truths, especially those gleaned by genealogy; are comprehensive, reflecting a plurality of perspectives; are treated as revisable; are an outgrowth of intellectual conscience and the discipline of the scientific method; and so on. Though we often do treat as normative only those affective attitudes that have these features, Nietzsche offers a story about why we should. Having an accurate view of the world, for Nietzsche, is an expression of power over oneself and one's environment — e.g., power over one's drives to simplify and to construct a worldview that suits one's immediate interests (*cf.* n. 10). Satisfying Nietzsche's epistemic constraints is an essential component of being a certain *type* of individual, one that achieves Nietzsche's broader ideal of freedom and, hence, power. The "precondition" (BGE 211; *cf.* GS 335) for creating new values that one satisfy these epistemic constraints can then be understood metaphysically: It is the attitudes of the higher types — specifically, the new philosophers who achieve this ideal of freedom, with all the psycho-physiological, historical, and epistemic demands that it implies — that ground genuine values.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to get clearer on this issue. On the connection between freedom and power, see GS 98, 347; GM II:2,18, III:10; TI IX:38; WP 720 [1885–1886]. "Freedom is strength or health of will... When the human drive synthesis is trained to discipline its exceptional complexity of parts and to subordinate them to a long-term and unifying project, it achieves a new kind of command... It's the philosopher... who experiences this freedom and responsibility to the greatest degree, by virtue of commanding, and becoming responsible for, the *most* such [drives and viewpoints]" (RICHARDSON 1996: 213–214). For further discussion of Nietzsche's

Treating the attitudes of the higher types as comprising the construction base is reinforced by Nietzsche's suggestions that the legitimacy of a value depends on what type of person it issues from, or on its etiology in the physiological and social history of the individual — hence the importance of genealogy (*cf.* HH 1–2; GM II:12–13). For example, despite Nietzsche's relentless condemnations of pity, he grants that “when such a man [who is by nature a master] has pity, well, *this* pity has value” (BGE 293). Nietzsche endorses the possibility of reaccepting values, though from different motives, after one's genealogical critique (WS 212; D 103).

Importantly, the claim is not that the attitudes of the new philosophers are used in the construction of new values because they have certain properties that are independently valuable. Nietzsche denies that anything is valuable in itself. What is basic in the metaethical account is the attitudes of a certain class of individuals — the new philosophers. The normativity of power, intellectual conscience, etc. is grounded in these more metaphysically fundamental evaluative attitudes. The fact, assuming it is a fact, that we take the epistemic and practical constraints that guide and regulate the attitudes of the new philosophers to be genuinely normative is good evidence that we have found the correct construction base, the set of attitudes that ground genuine values. But what is prior in the context of discovery (that such-and-such is valuable) does not correspond to what is prior in the metaphysics (the attitudes of such-and-such individuals). We must take care not to conflate the claim that such-and-such is good with the claim that such-and-such natural property grounds the property of being good. The former is an axiological claim about what is valuable; the latter is a metaphysical claim about the nature of value.<sup>19</sup>

I have said that evaluative properties, for Nietzsche, are grounded in the evaluative attitudes of the new philosophers. This raises a number of questions, only some of which I will even begin to address here. There will be a number of choice points. What is important for present purposes is less to decide among these alternatives than to observe that there are a plurality of ways of developing a Nietzschean constructivism.

---

descriptions of the higher types, see, e.g., LEITER 1992; 2002: 115–125; 2011; ROBERTSON 2012: 101–108.

<sup>19</sup>As has been emphasized forcefully in contemporary discussions, normative and metanormative questions about value and the nature of value are orthogonal to questions about how to deliberate and what the explicit objects of deliberation ought to be. As applied to the present case, accepting that evaluative properties are grounded in the evaluative attitudes of the new philosophers does not commit one to thinking that engaging in evaluative discourse involves, or ought to involve, attempting to predict what the new philosophers will value. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

Though what normative facts apply to an agent do not, in general, depend solely on that agent's evaluative attitudes, for the new philosophers we can say that what is valuable for  $X$  is grounded in  $X$ 's evaluative attitudes. This captures Nietzsche's claims that the new philosopher "create[s] for [him]self an ideal of [his] very own" (GS 335) and "invent[s] *his own* virtue, *his own* categorical imperative" (A 11). He "gives style" to his life by setting his own ends, ends which make genuine claims on him. What normative facts apply to a new philosopher depend solely on her own attitudes and the laws she legislates for herself (GS 335). But what should we say about the values of the rest of us? How do the normative reasons of individuals of the "herd" depend on the attitudes of the new philosophers?

One option is to say that a lower type's values are grounded in what the new philosophers value for her, and that the lower types are to promote the values of the higher types (*cf.* HURKA 2007). Alternatively, one might say that no normative facts apply to individuals of the herd (*cf.* ROBERTSON 2012). But Nietzsche appears to reject both of these options. "The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd," even if they should not "reach out beyond it" (WP 287 [1883–1888]). Under "industriousness, rule, moderation, firm 'conviction'... — in short, the 'herd virtues,'" the "intermediate type of man grows perfect" (WP 901 [1887]; *cf.* BGE 30). An individual of the herd still has normative reasons, values, etc., which, even if they do not depend directly on her attitudes, still seem to be importantly related to them.

One way of capturing this is as follows. It is well known that we can have evaluative preferences and judgments for hypothetical situations, even hypothetical situations of being in someone else's shoes. Considering someone's circumstances we often ask what we would do "if we were them." I might have an actual evaluative preference for the hypothetical case of being in Eve's position at the Tree of Knowledge, i.e., for the hypothetical case of self-ascribing the property of being Eve in such-and-such internal and external circumstances.

This suggests the following revision to our constructivist theory: What is valuable for a lower type  $X$  is grounded in what the new philosophers value for the circumstance of being  $X$ . Since the new philosophers reject that the same things must be valuable for different types of people, they may regard different things as good conditional on being someone whose perspective is more limited. They may have different valuations for the situation of being someone of a lower type.<sup>20</sup> Though for their actual situation they value "leisure, adventure, disbelief, even dissipation,"

---

<sup>20</sup>Nietzschean constructivism may thus bear interesting affinities to the contemporary naturalist account in RAILTON 1986, which treats an agent  $S$ 's non-moral good in terms of what  $S$ 's idealized self  $S^+$  —  $S$  with full information and non-defective instrumental rationality — would want for  $S$  were he to find himself in  $S$ 's position.

they know that such things would “necessarily destroy” them were they a different type of person (WP 901 [1887]). Thus, for the situation of being a “mediocre type of man,” they may instead value the sorts of “herd virtues” mentioned above.<sup>21</sup> Given their genealogical insights, the new philosophers will have a superior understanding of herd psychology. They will be better aware of how to integrate the lower types’ drives and affects in ways that promote health, learning from experience, and responsiveness to the environment, and that avoid self-defeating patterns of reasoning, noxious feelings, and self-consciousness. The attitudes of the new philosophers thus seem to be fit to ground normative facts that apply to the lower types.

This account has the additional advantage of capturing Nietzsche’s apparent denials of the existence of universal normative facts — values that all agents are to promote, ends that all agents have, reasons that all agents have to perform such-and-such kind of action, and so on.<sup>22</sup> (Though it is worth reiterating that constructivism does not itself force us to deny that there are universal values (§3.1).) We can continue to privilege the attitudes of the higher types in grounding evaluative facts — namely, by limiting the construction base to the attitudes of the new philosophers — while allowing that what is valuable can vary across individuals.

I have spoken of *the* attitudes of the new philosophers. But what if the attitudes of the new philosophers conflict? Should we assume that the new philosophers will agree in attitude on most, or even any, evaluative questions? In response, one option is to take what is valuable for a lower type as being grounded in what *all*, or alternatively *some*, of the new philosophers value for her. Depending on the extent of their disagreement, this may leave us with fewer genuine values or reasons, or alternatively with more normative conflicts and dilemmas, than we ordinarily think.

Another option is to ground values in what the new philosophers would agree to value as a group in the limit of some specified sort of deliberative process. This would yield a kind of contractualist account. Though grounding evaluative properties in counterfactual attitudes of the new philosophers would be a philosophically respectable move, it may be problematic on interpretive grounds. It seems to obscure Nietzsche’s claims that the new philosophers *create* values. Since facts about what certain agents would value in such-and-such conditions can hold even if no actual agent has those actual attitudes, coming to value new things need not bring

---

<sup>21</sup> See also A 57; Z II:6, IV:13; EH II:9; WP 287 [1883–1888], 893 [1887]. See also n. 22.

<sup>22</sup> See esp. GS 335; A 11; cf. D 174, 194; GS 55, 115, 382; Z III:11.2; BGE 43, 198, 202, 221, 225, 228, 259, 260; GM I:13; TI V:6; EH IV:4; WP 565 [1886]. See also n. 21. This leaves open whether Nietzsche takes there to be a universal higher-order value or norm — e.g., will to power, self-creation, freedom — that can be used to assess agents’ particular values or reasons (for discussion, see RICHARDSON 1996: 148–157, 2004: 115–126; SHAW 2007: 110; KATSAFANAS 2011).

about the existence of new genuine values. For a similar reason we would no longer be able to say that Nietzsche attempts to change what normative facts apply to certain of his hearers by virtue of changing their attitudes.

Treating evaluative properties as grounded in the actual attitudes of (some/most/all of) the new philosophers may better capture the importance Nietzsche places on the project of creating new values. Until individuals attain the freedom requisite for genuine value creation — an end which is by no means guaranteed (BGE 203) — there is a sense in which there are not any values.<sup>23</sup> Despite — despite? — the radical nature of this claim, Nietzsche seems to suggest precisely this: The new philosophers “really and continually *make* something *that is not yet there*: the whole perpetually growing world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations” (GS 301, emphasis mine).<sup>24</sup>

Our emphasis on the epistemic constraints Nietzsche places on the creation of new values naturally raises the question: What is the normative status of these epistemic constraints? As WILCOX (1974: 165–166) observes, part of Nietzsche’s revaluation of values involves a revaluation of *epistemic* values. Nietzsche’s new “table of values” must contain new epistemological, as well as practical, values — values embracing perspectival judgment, empirical knowledge, and so on. Are Nietzsche’s epistemic values attitude-dependent too? Are even our reasons to believe attitude-dependence attitude-dependent?

It is important to distinguish two questions in the vicinity. One question concerns why the metaphysical facts are as they are, or why it is specifically the attitudes of the new philosophers that ground normative facts. We should not expect Nietzsche to have an answer to this question since we do not typically demand explanations for claims about metaphysical claims about what constitutes what or what grounds what.

A second way of understanding the question concerns what makes putative epistemic values genuinely valuable, or what makes some proposition a genuine epistemic reason for so-and-so to believe something. This question is more legitimate — and extremely difficult. Although I doubt that Nietzsche had any established views on this issue, one option is to say, for the sake of consistency, that epistemic values are also attitude-dependent. What would make, e.g., examining issues from a multiplicity of perspectives epistemically valuable is that doing so is endorsed by the new philosophers. Admittedly, it is contentious how metaethical accounts like this

---

<sup>23</sup>Nietzsche seems to waver on whether there have already been such individuals; but if there have been, he thinks they are very rare (see, e.g., GM II:2, 16; Z P:4; A P; EH IV:1; WP 886 [1887]).

<sup>24</sup>See also GS 55; Z III:12.2; EH IV:1.

ought to be filled in and whether they can be made to work (STREET 2011).

Even if we do not interpret Nietzsche as a constructivist about epistemic values, our reasons to accept attitude-dependence might still be understood as being attitude-dependent. The claim of attitude-dependence might itself be treated as an evaluative claim. On this line, the nascent higher types will come through their genealogical inquiries to regard accepting attitude-independence as a symptom of weakness. Since this is a weakness they despise, they may spurn a positive attitude toward attitude-independence and, avoiding despair, endorse attitude-dependence.<sup>25</sup>

In these ways we can use Nietzsche's perspectivism and conception of epistemic values to help answer the question of what/whose attitudes ground normative facts. Nietzschean constructivism is not a kind of "voluntarism" which treats genuine values as the product of a brute act of will or "radical choice... which is not grounded in any reasons" (TAYLOR 1982: 118).<sup>26</sup> Genuine values, for Nietzsche, are not "arbitrary" in the sense of being arational. They are subject to various intuitively rational constraints: they are assessable in light of facts about the world, responsive to evidence, capable of and requiring justification, and so on. Of course these values might be "arbitrary" in the sense of being attitude-dependent. But this, again, is itself no obstacle to their making genuine claims on us.

## 4.2 Affects and evaluative attitudes

In the last section we saw that part of what privileges the attitudes of the new philosophers in the construction of normative properties is that the new philosophers have occupied a multiplicity of different perspectives. For Nietzsche, these perspectives are fundamentally *affective*. A perspective on the world involves experiencing it with certain interests and affects, attending to certain features over others; and changing one's perspective on something involves changing one's feelings toward it. In this section I will argue that we can use Nietzsche's views on the affects to yield a distinctive and improved answer to the question of what types of attitudes comprise the construction base for normative properties.

Valuing, on Nietzsche's view, is not a distinctively cognitive attitude specific to human beings. It is not an essentially structured attitude consisting of a basic "taking" attitude borne toward some content that is then ascribed the property of "being

---

<sup>25</sup>Cf. LANGSAM 1997: 243–244. For related discussion in contemporary metaethics, see BLACKBURN 1984: 217–219; GIBBARD 1990: 164–166, 2003: 183–186; STREET 2008, 2010a.

<sup>26</sup>For voluntarist interpretations, see NEHAMAS 1985; LARMORE 1996: 79–88; LANGSAM 1997; cf. LEITER 2002: 150.

valuable.” It needn’t even be conscious. Rather, valuing in its most basic form is to be identified with the affective coding of things and stimuli that we share with other creatures. Valuational attitudes are essentially affective, where an affect [*Affekt*] is a certain kind of pro- or con-attitude, a “For [or] Against” (WP 481 [1886–1887]). As RICHARDSON (1996: 37) puts it, “Value lies in the way the world is ‘polarized’ for each will and not in any theories or beliefs about value. It lies in how things ‘matter’ to the will,” in affects.<sup>27</sup> This way of understanding valuation bears an obvious resemblance to contemporary dual-process models of the mind. On these models, perceptual signals interact with the areas of the brain responsible for learning, encoding, and experiencing reward and affect before being accessible for higher-order self-conscious thought (e.g., HAIDT 2007, EVANS 2008; see n. 28). This prior affective system is indeed ancient and one we have inherited from non-human animals. Affective systems first code incoming information as having positive, negative, or neutral valence; this then shapes the content and character of the perception, and, in more intelligent animals, the associations, thoughts, and memories that are cued. We differentially attend to different features of our environment and assign significance relative to our ends. We represent a given situation *as dangerous*. It is on the basis of such evaluative representations that we are then readied for action. (It is important to emphasize that an “evaluative representation” in this psychological sense needn’t be understood as a representation of some fundamentally normative proposition or state of affairs.)

On Nietzsche’s view, not only isn’t it necessary for valuing to be conscious. Anticipating developments in contemporary empirical psychology, Nietzsche holds that valuing is often best when it *isn’t* conscious:<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>On non-human valuing, the non-consciousness of certain drives, and the connections between willing, valuing, affects, and drives, see also HH 32; GS 354; BGE 3, 19; WP 260 [1883–1884], 314 [1887–1888], 481 [1886–1887], 675 [1888], 688 [1888], 715 [1887–1888]; KSA 11.25[433] [1884], 11.26[72] [1884]. Thus I disagree with Hussain’s (2007: 163n.16) objection to interpreting Nietzsche as accepting attitude-dependence (to use my terminology) on the ground that Nietzsche treats “pro-attitudes themselves [as] constituted by evaluative judgments” and “bemoans” this fact (HH 32). The assumption of attitude-independence that renders these judgments “unjust” is not essential to the more basic pro- and con-attitudes from which values are constructed. It is with these points in mind that we can also understand Nietzsche’s attacks on “teleology”: valuation, though end-directed, needn’t involve conscious or deliberative aiming. For other interpretations of Nietzsche that have emphasized this point, see, e.g., NEHAMAS 1985, RAILTON 2012b. For contemporary discussion, see, e.g., RAILTON 2004, 2012a; TIBERIUS 2008. Thanks to Peter Railton for discussion.

<sup>28</sup>See also GS 11; WP 387 [1887–1888], 440 [1888]. On the liability of conscious reflection on one’s valuations, see esp. BARGH & CHARTRAND 1999, DIJKSTERHUIS ET AL. 2006. On the informativeness of the affects, discussed below, see, e.g., SCHWARZ & CLORE 1983, 2003, ORTONY ET AL. 1988, SLOVIC ET AL. 2004, SCHWARZ 2012, as well as references therein. See RAILTON 2012a,c,d for

If one considers that one is dealing with a sovereignly developed type that has ‘acted’ for countless millennia, and in which everything has become instinct, expediency, automatism, fatality, then the urgency of this moral question [‘How should one act?’] must actually seem ridiculous... [T]he becoming-conscious of the values by which one acts — betrays a certain sickliness; strong ages and peoples do not reflect... on their instincts and reasons. Becoming-conscious is a sign that real morality, i.e., instinctive certainty in actions, is going to the devil. (WP 423 [1888])

Our affects are the products of millennia of selection for efficiency and effectiveness. Consequently, they are paradigmatically informative (GM III:12; n. 17)<sup>29</sup> and regulative (GS 11; WP 387, 423, 440). By reflecting on our values and what to do, we often rob our affects of their force and momentum. We undermine their characteristic attunement to the diverse dimensions of our situation and environment, and the consequent capacity to translate this attunement directly into attention, motivation, and action. (Consider: the skilled free-throw shooter who suddenly starts thinking about how to shoot.)

In addition, it is our *active* affects — those that directly will power (WP 657 [1886–1887]) — that Nietzsche prizes most. Roughly, the will to power is the aim to overcome resistance and extend one’s influence and abilities, especially over oneself, but also over others and other things. Unlike their “passive” or “reactive” counterparts, which may include reflection, our active attitudes express health, strength, mastery, truth, and honesty, and are synthesized in a “master of a *free* will” (GM II:2; see also I:10–11, II:11–12).

This brief sketch of Nietzsche’s views on evaluative attitudes suggests a way of filling in our constructivist account. We can say that the construction base consists of these sorts of affective valuations. Since it is the new philosophers whose attitudes form the construction base, values will be grounded in specifically active attitudes that directly express a will to power and are integrated in a complex hierarchy toward a unifying project. (To reiterate, the claim is not that activity has some attitude-independent value which explains why it is active attitudes that comprise the construction base; what is metaphysically basic is a certain class of individuals, the attitudes of which ground the normativity of values (§4.1).)

---

discussion of the philosophical importance of the informative and regulative nature of the affects.

<sup>29</sup>Though, of course, not in all cases: consider “the venomous eye of *ressentiment*,” which sees the noble “dyed in another color, interpreted in another fashion” (GM I:11) and disposes the slavish to seek revenge with “the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred” (GM I:7). See JANAWAY 2007 for emphasis on the crucial role of the affects in Nietzsche’s genealogical method.



This philosophical account of the construction base is all well and good, one might grant, but there is something about it that might seem distinctly un-Nietzschean. I have treated the evaluative attitudes that comprise the construction base as affects. Affects are multi-channel representational attitudes. They prime attention, memory, thought, inference, feelings, learning, and reward in a directed appraisal of a situation. In certain circumstances this appraisal may then ready us for action in a plastic pursuit of some goal. Though it would be anachronistic to attribute to Nietzsche a view on the affects that is comparable to that of contemporary psychology, is it even accurate to treat Nietzsche as wielding the same concept? Didn't he think of the affects as *drives*? And aren't drives fundamentally non-teleological brute impulses? If so, why think such attitudes are fit to ground genuine values?

There is a potential limitation in Nietzsche's psychological view, but it should not be overstated. It is true that Nietzsche understands people in terms of societies of "drives" [*Trieb*], "forces" [*Kraft*], even "power quanta" [*Machtquanta*]. This might seem to suggest an antiquated non-teleological, hydraulic psychodynamics characteristic of 19th-century psychology or 20th-century behaviorism. Given the historical context, it would not be surprising if Nietzsche understood drives simply as directed releases of motivational energy. Though this is certainly not the place to offer a thorough investigation of Nietzsche's psychology and biology of drives and affects,<sup>30</sup> I think there is good evidence that Nietzsche understood drives in a way that more closely resembles affects in the contemporary psychologist's sense.

It is clear even from the stock phrase "will to power" that wills and drives, for Nietzsche, are directed attitudes toward some end. As Nietzsche's perspectivism makes vivid, these directed attitudes are crucially *intentional*. (Nietzsche sometimes speaks of this intentionality as characteristic of the drives of all living things, but we can bracket this excrescence here.) Drives are perspectives on some intentional object: "every center of force adopts a perspective toward the entire remainder, i.e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance" (WP 567 [1888]).<sup>31</sup> These perspectives are fundamentally *evaluative*. They influence the content and character of our experience (D 119),<sup>32</sup> and afford for the prospecting organism an evaluative representation of possible acts and outcomes. This representation, as we have seen, can be genuinely informative and regulative. Unlike brute instincts, which are, in a sense, merely passive — they happen *to us* — Nietzschean drives are, at their best, fundamentally active attitudes.

---

<sup>30</sup>See, e.g., PARKES 1994; POELLNER 1995; RICHARDSON 1996, 2004; LEITER 2007; JANAWAY 2007, 2009, 2012; KATSAFANAS 2008, 2012; CLARK & DUDRICK 2009; ANDERSON 2012.

<sup>31</sup>See also GM II:12, III:12; WP 254 [1885–1886], 481 [1883–1888], 636 [1888], 643 [1885–1886].

<sup>32</sup>See also GS 7, 139, 152, 301; BGE 186, 230. Cf. n. 49.

Take creativity, Nietzsche's paradigm activity. Creativity lies not in narrow motivations, but in complex, multi-channel attitudes. Listening to a riveting performance of the fourth movement of Dvořák's Ninth Symphony, or to John Coltrane tearing up a solo in Mr. P.C. does not just lead you to tap your foot. It elicits a range of emotions, imaginings, memories, ideas, expectations. You are sensitive to features of the phrasing, dynamics, and tempo and how they differ from those in other performances. You hear with expectation how the lines are to be shaped. You notice nascent feelings and the images they conjure. You attend to certain features of your body, the sensory character of the hall, and the audience's response, while completely ignoring others. Similarly, though the musician's creative act may not be governed by deliberation or intent, it is not merely "driven" or "on instinct." She is highly focused and sensitive to a wide array of subtle changes in circumstance and mood; she knows precisely what she is doing. This non-deliberative, non-self-conscious character is not only not a defect; it is a paradigm of skillful expression.

This should all sound familiar. Nietzschean drives are beginning to look less like brute impulses, instincts, or behavioral tendencies,<sup>33</sup> or even drives in the Freudian sense,<sup>34</sup> and more like affects as described above.<sup>35</sup> Indeed — and unabashedly begging the question — from the man himself: "will to power is the primitive form of affect" (WP 688 [1888]; cf. BGE 19). This is not to say that Nietzsche's focus on "drives" was without detriment. An emphasis on *Affekt* over *Trieb* would have been more accurate, or at least less misleading. In any case, what is important for present purposes is that we can extract from Nietzsche an attractive picture of the affects, one that is continuous with contemporary psychological research, in developing a distinctively Nietzschean version of constructivism.

Treating the construction base as constituted by the affective valuations of the new philosophers has a number of interpretive and philosophical features. First, it directly captures a very real sense in which "goodness" "resides in instinct" (WP 440 [1888]): value "resides in" instincts — understood in the directed, intentional way as qualified above — by being grounded in them.

Second, we can capture a sense in which normativity is grounded in states of agential activity. The values of the new philosophers are not grounded in attitudes that they simply find themselves with, or in other facts independent of their own creative will. For the new philosophers, responding to reasons and values is essentially

---

<sup>33</sup>Pace SCHACHT 1983; COX 1999; RICHARDSON 2004; JANAWAY 2007; LEITER 2007.

<sup>34</sup>Pace certain suggestions in KATSAFANAS 2012.

<sup>35</sup>An advantage of this account of drives and affects as affording evaluative representations is that it can capture the intentionality of these attitudes without having to attribute to them an implausible kind of agency, as in the interpretations in POELLNER 1995 and CLARK & DUDRICK 2009.

an active, creative process.<sup>36</sup>

Relatedly, third, it is a commonplace that Nietzsche values power. By restricting the construction base to the attitudes of the new philosophers, and hence to active drives, we can capture Nietzsche's presentations of the will to power as a principle guiding his reevaluation of values.<sup>37</sup> As exemplars of the will to power, the new philosophers will express this will in their genealogical critiques of their past and prospective values, and in which values they create.

Fourth, it is a general constraint on constructivist accounts that the attitudes comprising the construction base be characterizable in non-normative terms (STREET 2008: 239–242). For example, as noted above, the attitude of *treating* as valuable mustn't need to be understood in terms of *being* valuable. This is to avoid a charge of circularity, i.e., that the account builds the properties it is trying to explain into the explanans. Nietzschean constructivism straightforwardly satisfies this constraint. Affective drives — the attitudes treated as comprising the construction base — are examined extensively in Nietzsche's psychological investigations as well as in contemporary empirical psychology.

Finally, this account improves on certain contemporary constructivist accounts. On one prominent such account, that of Sharon Street, the construction base is treated as consisting of our unreflective, spontaneous normative judgments, or our attitudes of "taking to be a reason."<sup>38</sup> For Street, our understanding of the attitude of taking something to be a reason "is given by our knowledge of *what it is like* to have a certain [conscious] unreflective experience... I believe it is impossible adequately to characterize this experience except in... primitive evaluative terms, yet I think we all know exactly the type of experience I am pointing to" (2008: 240). No doubt Street is right about the familiarity of this type of experience and the existence of the attitude of taking-to-be-a-reason. But characterizing this allegedly basic attitude merely phenomenologically is insufficient. One must say more about its nature and function in creatures' psychic economy and behavior so as to illuminate why we should think that genuine reasons, values, etc. are constituted in terms it. By contrast, we can integrate our account of the construction base with Nietzsche's, and contemporary psychology's, more comprehensive views on affects and valuations. We typically understand value as essentially playing a certain causal and regulatory role, along with belief, in relating agents to the world and guiding action. Building

---

<sup>36</sup>For contemporary discussion of grounding reasons in passive vs. active attitudes, see, e.g., KORSGAARD 1996, WALLACE 2006, CHANG 2009.

<sup>37</sup>See, e.g., BGE 44, 293; GM P:3, P:6, I:12; A 2, 6, 62; WP 391 [1885–1886], 674 [1887–1888], 858 [1887–1888].

<sup>38</sup>See esp. STREET 2008: 239–242; see also her 2006: 127–128, 160n.33; 2010b: 366–367.

on our discussion in §4.1, given Nietzsche's account of the role of valuational attitudes in the higher types' overall health and mastery over self and environment, it is evident how these attitudes are fit to ground genuine value.

Let's recap. In §3 we saw that by interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist we could resolve the tension observed in §2 between Nietzsche's claims that nothing is valuable in itself, on the one hand, and his engagements in normative discourse and injunctions to create values, on the other. In this section we have developed a more precise, though by no means complete, version of constructivism. According to Nietzschean constructivism, as developed here, normative properties are grounded in properties of the affective valuations of the new philosophers. This account captures various further features of Nietzsche's ethics, metaethics, epistemology, and philosophical psychology, and is continuous with contemporary empirical research. It also provides further reasons for thinking that genuine values, values that make legitimate claims on us, are grounded in the proposed way.

## 5 Value creation and evaluative attitudes

It will be instructive to examine certain other interpretations that emphasize the importance of evaluative attitudes in accounting for the nature of value. This discussion, though necessarily brief for reasons of space, will help situate the proposed constructivist interpretation in the literature and clarify the relation between values and evaluative attitudes.

First, interpreters are sometimes unclear about what is required for a *metaethical* account of the dependence of values on evaluative attitudes. For example, Paul Katsafanas's "constitutivist" interpretation attempts to capture how power, though "not an objective value," has a "privileged normative status," namely, by its being "the constitutive aim of action" (2011: 634–635). On this view, even though power is not independently valuable, we, as actors, are committed to its being valuable insofar as it is the constitutive aim of willing. However, this view does not itself constitute a metaethical position on the nature of value. The claim that we are committed to the value of power, or even that power is the only thing that is intrinsically valuable, does not itself imply an answer to the question of what makes it the case that power is valuable (§3.1).<sup>39</sup> I do not deny that the step from the claim that we are com-

---

<sup>39</sup>Similar remarks hold for interpretations that appear to incorporate Nietzsche's valuing of power into a naturalist realist metaethical account that reduces value to power (see, e.g., SCHACHT 1973, 1983, KAUFMANN 1974, WILCOX 1974, HUNT 1991, RICHARDSON 1996, 2004, LANGSAM 1997, REGINSTER 2006). It is not always clear whether these interpretations ascribe to Nietzsche a genuinely

mitted to the value of power to the claim that this very commitment grounds the value of power is a natural one. But it is important to see that it is not forced upon us. Katsafanas's claim is consistent with the claim that power is valuable because it instantiates some other irreducible, non-natural property. Thus Katsafanas is too quick when he says that his account captures how "the value of power is created by us" (2011: 635). By contrast, our constructivist interpretation explicitly connects Nietzsche's denials of objectivity and his positive claims concerning value creation.

Second, constructivism is an instance of a more general type of metaethical position, sometimes called "subjectivist realism," which attempts to ground normative properties in psychological properties of agents. The kinds of subjectivist realism attributed to Nietzsche in the literature have been crude. On grounds of interpretive charity, this has led interpretations of this type to be summarily dismissed. For example, the significance of the distinction between values in the descriptive sense and values in the normative sense (§3.2) is often underappreciated, even among theorists who treat the latter as grounded in the former. For instance, on the interpretation in RICHARDSON 2004 — arguably the best developed subjectivist realist interpretation in the literature — Nietzsche refuses "to allow any values or goods that are not the intentional objects of some valuing; there's only a value if there's a valuing of it" (73; *cf.* 109, 113, 129).<sup>40</sup> The values one takes to be normative — one's "values to value" — are simply those goals that happen to be the objects of one's own valuing. Such a strong version of attitude-dependence is often thought to be implausible (*cf.* CLARK & DUDRICK 2007: 205). Among other things, it makes it hard to see how one could be mistaken or ignorant about what is genuinely valuable, or at least hard to see how *easy* it is to be mistaken or ignorant in this way. If I recognize that I have some value that I do not reflectively endorse, I may accept that it is an object of my own valuing — I may accept that I am "explained by [it] as an end" (129) — while denying that it is worth pursuing or has genuine normative force. By contrast, according to constructivism, values are constructed out of agents' evaluative attitudes without necessarily being identified with them. What an agent values and what is valuable for her can come apart.

Similarly, many interpreters seem to assume that denying the independence of values commits one to thinking that one's "own evaluative position... is no more than the expression of [one's] particular evaluative taste or sensibility" (REGINSTER 2006: 69), and that all evaluative judgments are "on the same epistemological plain"

---

metaethical claim about what grounds the property of being valuable, as opposed merely to an axiological claim about what is valuable. RICHARDSON 1996 is perhaps clearest on this, referring to Nietzsche's "external-realist intent."

<sup>40</sup>See KATSAFANAS 2011: 646–647 and LANGSAM 1997: 243 for similar attributions.

(LEITER 2002: 159; *cf.* 150, 161).<sup>41</sup> As we saw in §§3.2 and 4.1, this inference is too quick. There are more sophisticated ways of capturing the metaphysical dependence of values on evaluative attitudes that avoids these counterintuitive consequences. On the constructivist view developed here, evaluative judgments can be correct or incorrect and more or less supported by rational argument.

Third, different metaethical positions that connect motivational attitudes, values, and evaluative judgments are sometimes not adequately delineated in the literature. For example, CLARK & DUDRICK 2007 defends an interpretation of Nietzsche as a non-cognitivist.<sup>42</sup> Very roughly, non-cognitivists about normative language claim that normative sentences do not, as a matter of their conventional meaning, represent how the world is. Non-cognitivism is thus, in part, a *semantic* view — a view about the conventional contents of normative sentences, and, similarly, the nature of normative beliefs. As contemporary developments of non-cognitivism have underscored,<sup>43</sup> this semantic thesis is neutral on questions concerning the nature of normative properties, e.g., on whether normative properties are attitude-independent. The problem is that it is these latter questions, not the former semantic questions, that are of principal interest to Nietzsche — not to mention that it is highly implausible that Nietzsche even had worked out semantic view on the conventional meanings of normative terms.<sup>44</sup> The non-cognitivist needn't say that we make "things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not"; or that "the passions constitute 'all that has given color to existence'"; or that the new philosophers "create values... in part by inducing in people new affective responses to things" (CLARK & DUDRICK 2007: 203, 212).<sup>45</sup> Evidence that Nietzsche took there to be *some* connection between motivational attitudes and evaluative judgments is not sufficient for treating him as a non-cognitivist. Indeed, the texts in question, and even some of Clark and Dudrick's own remarks about them, better support a constructivist interpretation.

Finally, perhaps the strongest challenge to the constructivist interpretation offered in this paper comes from Nadeem Hussain's (2007) interpretation of Nietzsche as a revolutionary fictionalist.<sup>46</sup> Hussain's interpretation is rich. Though a thorough

---

<sup>41</sup> See NEHAMAS 1985 and LANGSAM 1997 for similar claims.

<sup>42</sup> See HUSSAIN 2011, 2012b for further discussion.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., BLACKBURN 1984, 1993, 1998; GIBBARD 1990, 2003. See also SILK 2013b for discussion.

<sup>44</sup> *Cf.* LEITER 2000: 278–279, 2002: 137n.17, 2008, 2011; SINHABABU 2007: 264n.1; HUSSAIN 2011: 39, 2012b: 131.

<sup>45</sup> Similar remarks hold for Leiter's (2008: 5) suggestion that Nietzsche's talk of creating new values by a legislative act of will could be treated as evidence for non-cognitivism.

<sup>46</sup> See also HUSSAIN 2011, 2012b; *cf.* REGINSTER 2006.

response must be reserved for elsewhere (SILK 2013a), I would like to make a preliminary case that a constructivist interpretation fares better.

Revolutionary fictionalism starts with an error theory about our current evaluative thought and talk. The error theory consists of a semantic claim and a metaphysical claim. The semantic claim is that normative predicates, as a matter of their conventional meaning, purport to refer to attitude-independent normative properties. The metaphysical claim is that there are no such properties. Thus, according to the error theorist, all sentences ascribing a normative predicate to some object are systematically false.<sup>47</sup> The revolutionary fictionalist proposes that we replace this problematic evaluative practice with one that no longer involves a commitment to attitude-independent normative properties. On the specific form of revolutionary fictionalism Hussain ascribes to Nietzsche, the free spirits are to engage in “a simulacrum of valuing”: “Nietzsche’s recommended practice is a form of make-believe or pretence. Nietzsche’s free spirits pretend to value something by regarding it as valuable in itself while knowing that in fact it is not valuable in itself” (2007: 170). It is in terms of such attitudes of “regarding as valuable” that Hussain proposes to understand Nietzsche’s injunctions for the free spirits to create values: The free spirits are to create values in the sense that they are to replace their previous practice of believing that things are valuable in themselves with a practice of regarding new things as valuable in themselves, while lacking the concomitant belief that they are.

Start with the fictionalist’s proposed replacement linguistic practice. First, it is puzzling why Hussain should think that a fictionalist interpretation is well placed to capture Nietzsche’s talk of value creation (§2). Nietzsche claims that we make things valuable even though they are not valuable in themselves. The problem for Hussain is that pretending to value does not create values any more than riding around cackling on a broom creates a witch. A fictionalist interpretation thus fails to capture Nietzsche’s claims that there are values and that the new philosophers transform reality by creating new values. Indeed, because of fictionalism’s commitment to error theory, a fictionalist interpretation is inconsistent with these claims. A constructivist interpretation, by contrast, can take Nietzsche’s claims about value creation at face value (§3.2). The new philosophers confer genuine value on the world.

Second, even if Hussain is right that having honest fictions is compatible with striving for truth,<sup>48</sup> it is hard to see how a fictionalist interpretation can capture Nietzsche’s epistemic constraints on value creation (§§2, 4.1). Consider the force of

---

<sup>47</sup>Or systematically suffer from presupposition failure, as on presuppositional versions of error theory, according to which normative predicates conventionally carry a false presupposition.

<sup>48</sup>HUSSAIN 2007: 168–170, responding to the objection in CLARK & DUDRICK 2007: 206n.6.

Nietzsche's praises of epistemic honesty and courage and corresponding denunciations of self-deception. And consider the lengths to which Nietzsche goes to disabuse us of our belief in attitude-independence, a belief that Nietzsche takes to be as dangerous as it is deeply engrained.<sup>49</sup> It would be surprising at best if Nietzsche's ultimate positive injunction for the free spirits was then for them to act as if they were too weak to "assume the right to new values..., the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit" (Z I:1), and had "rid [themselves] of the responsibility... of positing a goal for [themselves]" (WP 20 [1887]).<sup>50</sup> A constructivist interpretation avoids this worry. The new philosophers are to engage in genuine valuing, but a kind that does not assume a false metaphysics. They are not paralyzed by the contingency, risk, and provisionality in creating values: "no longer the humble expressions, 'everything is *merely* subjective,' but 'it is also *our* work! — Let us be proud of it!'" (WP 1059 [1884]).<sup>51</sup> In a paradigm expression of life-affirmation, the new philosophers embrace their values in full view of their metaphysical dependence on human evaluative attitudes. Nietzsche's theoretical inquiry into the nature of value motivates a practical reformation in how to live.

Hussain claims that interpreting Nietzsche as accepting the attitude-dependence of value cannot do justice to the apparent systematicity of Nietzsche's rejection of evaluative claims (2007: 161–163; 2011: 46–50; 2012a). This motivates Hussain to interpret Nietzsche as accepting an error theory. It would be easy to decry the fetishization and reification of value in the manner characteristic of error theorists, as Nietzsche in fact does, without having a sophisticated semantic view about whether evaluative terms *conventionally* purport to refer to attitude-independent normative properties. But it is crucial for the motivation of a fictionalist replacement of our ordinary evaluative practice that one does have such a view. It is only if a term could not be an evaluative term unless it referred to an attitude-independent property that any linguistic practice in which speakers used evaluative terms — or at least terms that are homophonous with our evaluative terms — without assuming attitude-independence would be incompatible with our current linguistic practice. The problem is that it is likely anachronistic to interpret Nietzsche as having this sort of sophisticated semantic view (n. 44). The constructivist can avoid this worry. Constructivism, as understood here, is a metaphysical thesis about the nature of

---

<sup>49</sup>Engrained, that is, by thousands of years of selection pressures favoring the herd instinct. See esp. D 9, 108; GS 110; WP 20 [1887]. On the resulting quasi-perceptual character of evaluative experience, see HH 3, 4; GS 1, 107, 301; CW E; WP 260 [1883–1888], 505 [1885–1886]; for discussion see POELLNER 2007, 2012, ANDERSON 2012, and KATSAFANAS 2012.

<sup>50</sup>See also D 108, GS 143; BGE 2, 261–262; GM II:2; A 54; WP 975 [1885–1886].

<sup>51</sup>See also GS 143, 335, 374; Z I:17; BGE 208; WP 568 [1888].



normativity. Strictly speaking, it is neutral on the semantics of normative terms. The Nietzschean constructivist can simply say that in light of the ubiquity of the acceptance of attitude-independence, many evaluative claims have assumed a false and psychologically deficient view of the world. Nietzsche's apparently error-theoretic claims are consistent with the denial of error theory.

## 6 Conclusion

Thus concludes our whirlwind tour of Nietzsche's normative and metanormative theory, touching on such themes as the revaluation of values, the will to power, perspectivism, drives and affects, Nietzsche's style, and practical nihilism. We began with a puzzle concerning an apparent tension among Nietzsche's claims that nothing is valuable in itself, his wholehearted endorsements of various values, and his injunctions for the free spirits to create new values. By interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist we can resolve this puzzle: Some things are genuinely valuable, but their value is grounded in facts about creatures' evaluative attitudes; thus by coming to value new things, the new philosophers can create new genuine values. Drawing on Nietzsche's broader epistemological and psychological views, I developed a distinctive, and genuinely Nietzschean, version of constructivism. On this account, evaluative properties are grounded in the affective valuations of the new philosophers. Of course much more work is required, and many interpretive and philosophical questions remain. But I hope to have shown that the resulting version of constructivism is not only plausibly attributable to Nietzsche — all the usual caveats and hedges notwithstanding — but also worthy of attention in contemporary theorizing.

## References

- ANDERSON, R. LANIER. 2012. What is a Nietzschean self? In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 202–235.
- BAGNOLI, CARLA. 2002. Moral constructivism: A phenomenological argument. *Topoi* 21, 125–138.
- BARGH, JOHN A. & TANYA L. CHARTRAND. 1999. The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist* 54, 462–479.
- BLACKBURN, SIMON. 1984. *Spreading the word*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- BLACKBURN, SIMON. 1993. *Essays in quasi-realism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- BLACKBURN, SIMON. 1998. *Ruling passions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- CHANG, RUTH. 2009. Voluntarist reasons and the sources of normativity. In DAVID SOBEL & STEVEN WALL (Eds.), *Reasons for action*, pp. 243–271. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CLARK, MAUDEMARIE. 1990. *Nietzsche on truth and philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CLARK, MAUDEMARIE & DAVID DUDRICK. 2007. Nietzsche and moral objectivity: The development of Nietzsche's metaethics. In LEITER & SINHABABU (2007), pp. 192–226.
- CLARK, MAUDEMARIE & DAVID DUDRICK. 2009. Nietzsche on the will: An analysis of BGE 19. In GEMES & MAY (2009).
- COLLI, GIORGIO & MAZZINO MONTINARI (Eds.). 1980. *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 bänden*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- COX, CHRISTOPH. 1999. *Nietzsche: Naturalism and interpretation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DARWALL, STEPHEN, ALLAN GIBBARD, & PETER RAILTON. 1992. Toward *fin de siècle* ethics: Some trends. *Philosophical Review* 101, 115–189.
- DIJKSTERHUIS, AP, MAARTEN W. BOS, LORAN F. NORDGREN, & RICK B. VAN BAAREN. 2006. On making the right choice: The deliberation-without-attention effect. *Science* 311, 1005–1007.
- ENOCH, DAVID. 2009. Can there be a global, interesting, coherent constructivism about practical reason. *Philosophical Explorations* 12, 319–339.
- EVANS, JONATHAN ST.B.T. 2008. Dual-processing accounts of reasoning, judgment, and social cognition. *Annual Review of Psychology* 59, 255–278.
- FINE, KIT. 2012. Guide to ground. In FABRICE CORREIA & BENJAMIN SCHNIEDER (Eds.), *Metaphysical grounding: Understanding the structure of reality*, pp. 37–80. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- GEMES, KEN & SIMON MAY (Eds.). 2009. *Nietzsche on freedom and autonomy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- GIBBARD, ALLAN. 1990. *Wise choices, apt feelings: A theory of normative judgment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- GIBBARD, ALLAN. 2003. *Thinking how to live*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- HAIDT, JONATHAN. 2007. The new synthesis in moral psychology. *Science* 316, 998–1002.
- HUNT, LESTER. 1991. *Nietzsche and the origin of virtue*. London: Routledge.
- HURKA, THOMAS. 2007. Nietzsche: Perfectionist. In LEITER & SINHABABU (2007), pp. 9–31.
- HUSSAIN, NADEEM & NISHI SHAH. 2006. Misunderstanding metaethics: Korsgaard's rejection of realism. In RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU (Ed.), *Oxford studies in metaethics*, vol. 1, pp. 265–294. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- HUSSAIN, NADEEM J.Z. 2007. Honest illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche's free spirits. In LEITER & SINHABABU (2007), pp. 157–191.
- HUSSAIN, NADEEM J.Z. 2011. Nietzsche's metaethical stance. In KEN GEMES & JOHN RICHARDSON (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Nietzsche* (forthcoming). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- HUSSAIN, NADEEM J.Z. 2012a. Metaethics and nihilism in Reginster's *The affirmation of life*. *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43, 99–117.
- HUSSAIN, NADEEM J.Z. 2012b. Nietzsche and non-cognitivism. In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 111–132.
- JANAWAY, CHRISTOPHER. 2007. *Beyond selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- JANAWAY, CHRISTOPHER. 2009. Autonomy, affect, and the self in Nietzsche's project of Genealogy. In GEMES & MAY (2009).
- JANAWAY, CHRISTOPHER. 2012. Nietzsche on morality, drives, and human greatness. In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 183–201.

- JANAWAY, CHRISTOPHER & SIMON ROBERTSON. 2012a. Introduction: Nietzsche on naturalism and normativity. In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 1–19.
- JANAWAY, CHRISTOPHER & SIMON ROBERTSON (Eds.). 2012b. *Nietzsche, naturalism, and normativity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- KATSAFANAS, PAUL. 2008. *Practical reason and the structure of reflective agency*. Ph.d. thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- KATSAFANAS, PAUL. 2011. Deriving ethics from action: A Nietzschean version of constitutivism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83, 620–660.
- KATSAFANAS, PAUL. 2012. Nietzsche's philosophical psychology. In JOHN RICHARDSON & KEN GEMES (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Nietzsche* (forthcoming). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- KAUFMANN, WALTER. 1974. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, psychologist, antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 4th edn.
- KAUFMANN, WALTER (Ed. and Trans.). 1954. *The portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Press.
- KAUFMANN, WALTER (Ed. and Trans.). 1967. *The basic writings of Nietzsche*. New York: Random House.
- KORSGAARD, CHRISTINE M. 1996. *The sources of normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LANGSAM, HAROLD. 1997. How to combat nihilism: Reflections on Nietzsche's critique of morality. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14, 235–253.
- LARMORE, CHARLES. 1996. *The morals of modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LEITER, BRIAN. 1992. Nietzsche and aestheticism. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, 275–290.
- LEITER, BRIAN. 1994. Perspectivism in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of morals*. In RICHARD SCHACHT (Ed.), *Nietzsche, genealogy, morality*, pp. 334–357. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- LEITER, BRIAN. 2000. Nietzsche's metaethics: Against the privilege readings. *European Journal of Philosophy* 8, 277–297.
- LEITER, BRIAN. 2002. *Nietzsche on morality*. London: Routledge.
- LEITER, BRIAN. 2007. Nietzsche's theory of the will. *Philosophers' Imprint* 7, 1–15.
- LEITER, BRIAN. 2008. Is Nietzsche a fictionalist? In *Brian Leiter's Nietzsche blog*. URL <http://brianleiternietzsche.blogspot.com/2008/03/is-nietzsche-fictionalist.html>.
- LEITER, BRIAN. 2011. Nietzsche's moral and political philosophy. In EDWARD N. ZALTA (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Summer 2011 edn.
- LEITER, BRIAN & NEIL SINHABABU (Eds.). 2007. *Nietzsche and morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LENMAN, JAMES. 2010. Humean constructivism in moral theory. In RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU (Ed.), *Oxford studies in metaethics*, vol. 5, pp. 175–193. Oxford University Press.
- LENMAN, JAMES & YONATAN SHEMMER (Eds.). 2012. *Constructivism in practical philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MAGNUS, BERND. 1988. The use and abuse of *The will to power*. In ROBERT C. SOLOMON & KATHLEEN HIGGINS (Eds.), *Reading Nietzsche*, pp. 218–235. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- NEHAMAS, ALEXANDER. 1985. *Nietzsche: Life as literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1954a. *Nietzsche contra Wagner*. In KAUFMANN (1954).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1954b. *The Antichrist*. In KAUFMANN (1954).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1954c. *The case of Wagner*. In KAUFMANN (1954).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1954d. *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. In KAUFMANN (1954).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1954e. *Twilight of the idols*. In KAUFMANN (1954).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1967a. *Beyond good and evil*. In KAUFMANN (1967).

- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1967b. *Ecce homo*. In KAUFMANN (1967).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1967c. *On the genealogy of morality*. In KAUFMANN (1967).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1967d. *The birth of tragedy*. In KAUFMANN (1967).
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1968. *The will to power*. WALTER KAUFMANN AND R.J. HOLLINGDALE (Trans.), New York: Vintage.
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1986. *Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*. R.J. HOLLINGDALE (Trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1997a. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the prejudices of morality*. MAUDEMARIE CLARK AND BRIAN LEITER (Eds.), R.J. HOLLINGDALE (Trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 1997b. *Untimely meditations*. DANIEL BREAZEALE (Ed.), R.J. HOLLINGDALE (Trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDERICH. 2001. *The gay science*. BERNARD WILLIAMS (Ed.) and JOSEFINE NAUCKHOFF (Trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ORTONY, ANDREW, GERALD L. CLORE, & ALLAN COLLINS. 1988. *The cognitive structure of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- PARKES, GRAHAM. 1994. *Composing the soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's psychology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- POELLNER, PETER. 1995. *Nietzsche and metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- POELLNER, PETER. 2001. Perspectival truth. In BRIAN LEITER & JOHN RICHARDSON (Eds.), *Nietzsche*, pp. 85–117. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- POELLNER, PETER. 2007. Affect, value, and objectivity. In LEITER & SINHABABU (2007), pp. 227–261.
- POELLNER, PETER. 2012. Aestheticist ethics. In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 52–80.
- RAILTON, PETER. 1986. Moral realism. *Philosophical Review* 95, 163–207.

- RAILTON, PETER. 2004. How to engage reason: The problem of regress. In R. JAY WALLACE, PHILIP PETTIT, SAMUEL SCHEFFLER, & MICHAEL SMITH (Eds.), *Reason and value: Themes from the moral philosophy of Joseph Raz*, pp. 176–201. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RAILTON, PETER. 2010. Toward a unified account of rationality in belief, desire, and action. MS, University of Michigan.
- RAILTON, PETER. 2012a. The affective dog and its rational tale. MS, University of Michigan.
- RAILTON, PETER. 2012b. Nietzsche's normative theory? The art and skill of living well. In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 20–51.
- RAILTON, PETER. 2012c. That obscure object, desire. In AMY E. FERRER (Ed.), *Proceedings and addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 86:2, pp. 22–46. Newark, DE: American Philosophical Association.
- RAILTON, PETER. 2012d. Two cheers for virtue. In MARK TIMMONS (Ed.), *Oxford studies in normative ethics*, vol. 1, pp. 295–329. Oxford University Press.
- REGINSTER, BERNARD. 2006. *The affirmation of life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- RICHARDSON, JOHN. 1996. *Nietzsche's system*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RICHARDSON, JOHN. 2004. *Nietzsche's new Darwinism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ROBERTSON, SIMON. 2012. The scope problem — Nietzsche, the moral, ethical, and quasi-aesthetic. In JANAWAY & ROBERTSON (2012b), pp. 81–110.
- ROSEN, GIDEON. 2010. Metaphysical dependence: Grounding and reduction. In BOB HALE & AVIV HOFFMANN (Eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, logic, and epistemology*, pp. 109–136. New York: Oxford University Press.
- SCHACHT, RICHARD. 1973. Nietzsche and nihilism. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11, 65–90.
- SCHACHT, RICHARD. 1983. *Nietzsche*. London: Routledge.

- SCHAFFER, JONATHAN. 2009. On what grounds what. In DAVID J. CHALMERS, DAVID MANLEY, & RYAN WASSERMAN (Eds.), *Metametaphysics: New essays on the foundations of ontology*, pp. 347–383. New York: Oxford University Press.
- SCHWARZ, NORBERT. 2012. Feeling-as-information theory. In PAUL A.M. VAN LANGE, ARIE W. KRUGLANSKI, & E.TORY HIGGINS (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, vol. 1, pp. 289–308. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- SCHWARZ, NORBERT & GERALD L. CLORE. 1983. Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45, 513–523.
- SCHWARZ, NORBERT & GERALD L. CLORE. 2003. Mood as information: 20 years later. *Psychological Inquiry* 14, 296–303.
- SHAFFER-LANDAU, RUSS. 2005. *Moral realism: A defense*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SHAW, TASMIN. 2007. *Nietzsche's political skepticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- SILK, ALEX. 2013a. Nihilism, art, and value creation in Nietzsche's ethics and metaethics. MS, University of Michigan.
- SILK, ALEX. 2013b. Truth-conditions and the meanings of ethical terms. In RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU (Ed.), *Oxford studies in metaethics*, vol. 8, pp. 195–222. New York: Oxford University Press.
- SINHABABU, NEIL. 2007. Vengeful thinking and moral epistemology. In LEITER & SINHABABU (2007), pp. 262–280.
- SLOVIC, PAUL, MELISSA L. FINUCANE, ELLEN PETERS, & DONALD G. MACGREGOR. 2004. Risk as analysis and risk as feelings: Some thoughts about affect, reason, risk, and rationality. *Risk Analysis* 24, 311–322.
- STREET, SHARON. 2006. A darwinian dilemma for realist theories of value. *Philosophical Studies* 127, 109–166.
- STREET, SHARON. 2008. Constructivism about reasons. In RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 3. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- STREET, SHARON. 2010a. Objectivity and truth: You'd better rethink it. MS, NYU.



- STREET, SHARON. 2010b. What is constructivism in ethics and metaethics? *Philosophy Compass* 5, 363–384.
- STREET, SHARON. 2011. Evolution and the normativity of epistemic reasons. In RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 6. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- STREET, SHARON. 2012. Coming to terms with contingency: Humean constructivism about practical reason. In LENMAN & SHEMMER (2012), pp. 40–59.
- TAYLOR, CHARLES. 1982. Responsibility for self. In GARY WATSON (Ed.), *Free will*, pp. 111–126. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TIBERIUS, VALERIE. 2008. *The reflective live: Living wisely within our limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TROGDON, KELLY. 2013. An introduction to grounding. In MIGUEL HOELTJE, BENJAMIN SCHNIEDER, & ALEX STEINBERG (Eds.), *Varieties of dependence*, pp. 97–122. Munich: Philosophia Verlag.
- VELLEMAN, DAVID. 2009. *How we get along*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WALLACE, R. JAY. 2006. *Normativity and the will*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- WALLACE, R. JAY. 2007. *Ressentiment, value, and self-vindication: Making sense of Nietzsche's slave revolt*. In LEITER & SINHABABU (2007), pp. 110–137.
- WEDGWOOD, RALPH. 2002. Practical reasoning as figuring out what is best: Against constructivism. *Topoi* 21, 139–152.
- WESTPHAL, KENNETH. 1984. Was Nietzsche a cognitivist? *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22, 343–363.
- WILCOX, JOHN T. 1974. *Truth and value in Nietzsche: A study of his metaethics and epistemology*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.