

Nietzsche and Contemporary Metaethics

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1 Nietzsche's Metaethics?

A natural entrée into Nietzsche's views on ethics and normativity is by way of an interpretive puzzle. Some of Nietzsche's claims about value can seem puzzling when seen alongside his expressions of his own values. It is surprising 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)¹

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)

¹I 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 isn't included, I cite it by the volume, notebook number, and note number in Colli & Montinari 1980 (KSA). I include the year for all notes.

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).

On the one hand, Nietzsche makes claims to the effect that there are no evaluative facts (consider: “error theorist,” “nihilist”). On the other hand, he ardently engages in evaluative discourse and recommends an evaluative perspective. The puzzle is how a philosopher of Nietzsche’s pedigree, acuity, and self-awareness could take up such a normative and metanormative stance. If Nietzsche thinks that there are no evaluative facts, is he being insincere when expressing his endorsement of certain values and rejection of others? Can one honestly accept and recommend an evaluative perspective while denying that anything is valuable in itself?

This puzzle — even if not articulated in precisely this way — has prompted significant recent interest in Nietzsche’s metaethics. This may also seem surprising: Metaethics as a field of inquiry didn’t even begin to come into its own until the mid-20th century. Nietzsche may have been ahead of his time on some philosophical and psychological matters; but can we really expect to discern a coherent normative and metanormative perspective in Nietzsche’s writings? Interpreting Nietzsche is hard enough as it is. Is investigating Nietzsche’s metaethics, even if he had one, likely to be theoretically fruitful?

We shouldn’t despair at the possibility of delineating metaethical views in Nietzsche’s writings (cf. Wilcox 1974: 201; Reginster 2006: 100; Hussain 2011: 12, 52–53). Indeed, the principal question which will concern us here — the question of the attitude-(in)dependence of value, what some have regarded as *the* central metaethical question (cf. Street 2008b: 222–4) — goes back most famously to Plato (think: *Euthyphro*). Interpretive caution will certainly be in order. We shouldn’t expect Nietzsche to have a complete metaethical theory, or to articulate his views with the systematicity that characterizes contemporary discussions. But I hope to show that by ascribing certain metaethical views to Nietzsche we can make better sense of the character and content of his writings than we otherwise would. Nietzsche provides a compelling example of how metanormative inquiry can undergird normative evaluation in practice.

Metaethics — and metanormative theory generally — investigates metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological issues about normative language and judgment; it examines thought and talk about what we ought to do, how to live,

what is good, beautiful, wrong, fitting, etc.² For instance: What part of reality, if any, is such thought and talk about? How does this part of reality, if there is one, fit in with other parts of reality? How do we have knowledge of it? How should we explain the conventional meaning of normative language? What is the nature of normative judgment? Examining the above interpretive puzzle will provide a natural entryway into Nietzsche's potential views on such questions. I will focus primarily on matters concerning the nature and grounds of normativity, though we will see that interpreters have ascribed to Nietzsche views on the broader range of metaethical questions.

The chapter is organized as follows: §2 lays out our interpretive puzzle in greater detail. §3 examines what is perhaps the most prominent response: Nadeem Hussain's (2007) interpretation of Nietzsche as a revolutionary fictionalist. Hussain's discussion highlights important connections, for Nietzsche, between art, practical nihilism, and value creation. Yet I will argue that a fictionalist interpretation faces pressing challenges. §4 offers what I regard as an improved constructivist interpretation, developed elsewhere (Silk 2015b). Values, on this view, are treated as grounded purely in facts about creatures' evaluative attitudes. Finally, §5 briefly considers several alternative subjectivist realist, constitutivist, and non-cognitivist interpretations. Examining these views will help clarify the connection, for Nietzsche, between value and evaluative attitudes. A more nuanced understanding of the space of metaethical theories brings into relief a more plausible normative and metanormative view that we can attribute to Nietzsche.

2 The puzzle

A persistent theme throughout Nietzsche's writings is that nothing has value "in itself" and, consequently, that evaluative judgments involve a kind of error. Though Nietzsche often focuses his attacks on specifically moral properties and claims,³ his critiques, even throughout his mature period, seem to extend to all normative properties and claims. In addition to D 210 and GS 301 (see §1), consider: "What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not?"

²A distinction is sometimes made between deontic or normative terms ('must', 'permissible') and evaluative terms ('good', 'beautiful'). It isn't uncontroversial how these families of terms are related, either in general or for Nietzsche. I will use 'normative' and 'evaluative' indiscriminately to cover notions in both families. No harm will come from this since Nietzsche's apparently nihilistic metanormative claims are about both types, and his positive substantive claims use both types of terms. I won't distinguish between metaethics and metanormative theory more generally.

³See, e.g., HH 4; D 103; BGE 108; CW E; TI VII:1; WP 428 [1888].

And in themselves I think they never are!” (GS 299). Hence, there is a “necessary injustice” (HH P:6, 32–33) in evaluative judgments.⁴

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. Not all evaluative judgments are treated on a par, for Nietzsche. “Beyond Good and Evil. — At least this does not mean ‘Beyond Good and Bad’ ” (GM I:17). 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). Nietzsche not only takes up a particular normative perspective, but also regards it as warranted or fitting, and disagrees with people accepting alternative views: 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 authority.⁵

Whence their normative authority? One of Nietzsche’s favored metaphors — metaphors? — is to treat these 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).⁶ “He who *determines* values... is the *highest* man” (WP 999 [1884]); he is “*value-creating*” (BGE 260). “That anything at all is good and evil — that is his creation” (Z III:12.2).⁷ What is

⁴See also D 3; GS 115; Z I:12,15, II:12; BGE P; TI II:2; A 11; WP 12 [1888], 25 [1887], 565 [1886], 789 [1885–1886].

⁵See also, e.g., 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].

⁶It isn’t obvious how Nietzsche understands the relation between these categories of individuals. For consistency I will say that it’s the *free spirits* whom Nietzsche enjoins to create new values, and it’s the *new philosophers*, a subclass of free spirits and higher types, who create such values.

⁷See 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;

special about the new philosophers isn't simply that they come to value new things. If people began valuing things that harmed the higher types and prevented human flourishing and excellence, Nietzsche wouldn't be quite so enthusiastic. Call a value *genuine* if it makes legitimate claims on us, if it is genuinely normative; to call a value 'genuine' in this sense is to express one's endorsement of it. What Nietzsche is suggesting is that the new philosophers create new *genuine* values: values that afford a critical, authoritative perspective on how to act, feel, and be. This is what distinguishes the new philosophers' reevaluation of values from the slaves' reevaluation of values in the slave revolt (GM I).

Although human beings have conferred value on things (in some manner to be explained), not just any human beings or values will do. Nietzsche took there to be epistemic and psychological 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" (GS 2). The new philosopher's values must be informed by, or at least consistent with, the sciences, and reflect the discipline of the scientific method. The created values must embody insights from many perspectives. Occupying different, possibly opposed points of view is a "precondition" for the new philosopher's ultimate "task": to "*create values*" (BGE 211).⁸

In sum, our interpretive puzzle is this: Though (a) Nietzsche claims that nothing has value in itself, (b) he engages in normative discourse, endorsing certain values and rejecting others, and (c) enjoins the free spirits to create new values, (d) values that must meet certain conditions for them to have genuine normative authority.

BGE 203, 211; A 11, 13; EH IV:1; WP 260 [1883–1888], 972 [1884], 979 [1885].

⁸See also BT SC 7; WS 44; HH P:6; D 45; GS P:3, 11, 110, 123, 283–284, 290, 335; Z II:22.2, IV:15; BGE 30, 39, 227–230, 284; 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, Leiter 2002, Hussain 2007, Silk 2015b for further discussion of Nietzsche's constraints on value creation. Though Nietzsche grants that having false beliefs can sometimes be necessary for preserving and promoting life (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.

3 Nietzschean fictionalism?

Nadeem Hussain argues, in an influential series of papers, that interpreting Nietzsche as a *revolutionary fictionalist* best resolves the sort of interpretive puzzle from §2 (see esp. Hussain 2007, also 2011, 2012a; cf. Reginster 2006). In this section I will describe and raise several challenges for Hussain's fictionalist interpretation. In the next section I will argue that a constructivist interpretation provides an improved account of Nietzsche's evaluative and metanormative perspective.

Revolutionary fictionalism starts with an *error theory* about our current normative thought and talk. The error theory consists of a semantic claim and a metaphysical claim. The semantic claim is that normative predicates conventionally purport to refer to *attitude-independent* normative properties — roughly, properties which can hold of something independently of the evaluative attitudes of any relevant agent (or agents). The metaphysical claim is that there are no attitude-independent normative properties. So, the error theorist concludes, all ascriptions of normative predicates — e.g., all sentences of the form $N(x)$, for normative predicate N — are systematically untrue. The *revolutionary fictionalist* proposes that we replace this problematic evaluative practice with a practice that doesn't involve 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).

Crucial to motivating Hussain's fictionalist interpretation is the connection, for Nietzsche, between practical nihilism, art, and value creation. Rather than succumbing to total despair in response to “the ultimate goallessness of man” (HH 33) — the belief that nothing is valuable in itself — the free spirits are to “learn from artists” (GS 299) for it is they who will “know how to console themselves” (HH 33). Specifically, according to Hussain's interpretation, the free spirits are to learn how to generate “honest illusions,” or how to regard things as valuable in themselves even while knowing that they aren't. It's in terms of such attitudes of “regarding as valuable” that Hussain understands 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 practice of believing that certain things are valuable in themselves with a practice of regarding new things as valuable in themselves, without believing that they are.

I have two main worries for Hussain's fictionalist interpretation: first, that its ascription of an error theory to Nietzsche is undermotivated; second, that invoking a practice of honest illusions fails to capture Nietzsche's claims about value creation.

Start with the error theory. Hussain claims that attributing an error theory to Nietzsche is necessary to capture the apparent systematicity of Nietzsche's rejection of normative claims (Hussain 2007: 161–3; 2011: 46–50; 2012a). If we interpret Nietzsche as rejecting error theory, and accepting that values are fundamentally attitude-dependent (hereafter “accepting attitude-dependence”)

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Normative properties (if there are any) are ultimately grounded purely in properties of agents' evaluative attitudes (perhaps in conjunction with the non-normative facts about the relevant circumstances).⁹

we must “[interpret] him as having contradictory views” (2012a: 103).

The inference from “Nietzsche rejects ascriptions of attitude-independent normative properties” to “Nietzsche accepts an error theory about normative language” is too quick. It would be easy to decry the fetishization and reification of value in the manner characteristic of error theorists, as Nietzsche does, without having a sophisticated semantic view about whether normative predicates *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 couldn't be a normative term unless it referred to an attitude-independent property that any linguistic practice in which speakers used normative terms — or at least terms that are homophonous with our normative terms — without assuming attitude-independence would be incompatible with our current linguistic practice (cf. Campbell 2014: 477). The problem is that it is likely anachronistic to interpret Nietzsche as having this sort of sophisticated semantic view.¹⁰

The metaethical questions of principal interest to Nietzsche aren't semantic questions — questions about the conventional meaning of normative language. They are broadly *metaphysical* questions about the nature of normative properties. What Nietzsche is denying in the apparent error-theoretic passages is that there are attitude-independent normative properties. Perhaps, in light of certain speakers' acceptance of attitude-independence, many normative claims have assumed a false and psychologically deficient view of the world. But this is insufficient for an error theory.

⁹Henceforth I will 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.

¹⁰Cf. Leiter 2000: 278–9, 2002: 137n.17, 2008, 2011; Sinhababu 2007: 264n.1; Hussain 2011: 39, 2012b: 131.

One can accept a metaphysics on which nothing is valuable independent of agents' evaluative attitudes, while being neutral on the semantics of whether our linguistic conventions assume otherwise.

Now turn to the Nietzschean fictionalist's proposed replacement linguistic practice. Recall Nietzsche's injunctions for the free spirits to create values (§2). Nietzsche's task is to *transform reality*: it is to "*mak[e]* things" valuable even though they aren't valuable "in themselves" (GS 299). It is puzzling why Hussain regards a fictionalist interpretation as well-placed to capture talk about value *creation*. Pretending to value doesn't create values any more than riding around cackling on a broom creates a witch. A fictionalist interpretation thus obscures Nietzsche's claims that there are values and that the new philosophers (in some sense to be explained) make this the case: "Whatever has *value* in the present world has [...] been given, granted value, and *we* were the givers and granters!" (GS 301). Indeed, because of its commitment to error theory, fictionalism is inconsistent with these claims.

Hussain's discussions shed new light on the connections among art, avoiding practical nihilism, and value creation. But, I will argue, Nietzsche's views on these connections needn't call for a fictionalist interpretation.

Nietzsche is intent on highlighting pervasive, and what he regards as deeply problematic, features of our evaluative practices. Certain of our values and beliefs are deeply engrained by thousands of years of selection pressures favoring what Nietzsche calls the "herd instinct" — roughly, our disposition to copy others and develop habits, practices, feelings, beliefs, and values that favor the survival or expansion of our social group. One such belief is the belief that our values are unconditional and apply independently of us and our attitudes. Distrusting individuality, we become reluctant to take responsibility for our values, and fail to see our attitudes as sufficient to ground their normativity. We need an external authority to sanction our values as making legitimate demands on us.

But up to now the moral law has been supposed to stand *above* our own likes and dislikes: one did not want actually to *impose* this law upon oneself, one wanted to *take* it from somewhere or *discover* it somewhere or *have it commanded to one* from somewhere. (D 108)

[We have an] old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded *from outside* — by some *superhuman authority*. Having unlearned faith in that, one still follows the old habit and seeks *another* authority that can *speak unconditionally* and *command* goals and tasks [...] One wants to get around the will, the willing of a goal, the risk of

positing a goal for oneself; one wants to rid oneself of the responsibility.
(WP 20 [1887])¹¹

Positing an agent-external sanction for our values not only allows us to avoid taking responsibility for them; it makes it possible for us to regard them as having normative force at all. The belief that certain things are good in themselves, though an “erroneous [article] of faith,” “almost [becomes] part of the basic endowment of the species” (GS 110). Our evaluative experience even comes to have a quasi-perceptual character: “Our world” becomes “*colored* by [moral evaluations]” (WP 260 [1883–1888]; cf. n. 17).¹²

Given our entrenched psycho-social commitment to attitude-independence, denying that there are attitude-independent values poses a serious threat. It “emaciates the fundamental drives and desires that provide psychological unity and strength to the agent” (2011: 14). Overcoming this sort of psychological response — *practical nihilism* — is by no means inevitable (BGE 203).¹³ From his earliest writings Nietzsche is adamant about the importance of art in responding to this threat of nihilism. As we have seen, when confronted with the realization that nothing has value in itself, “we should learn from artists” (GS 299) for it is they who will “know how to console themselves” (HH 33). How is it that Nietzsche thinks art can help?

First, we can agree with Hussain that art can play a *palliative* role for the free spirits. The project of genealogy and the ruthless skepticism it demands can be psychologically destabilizing. “At every step one has to wrestle for truth [...] That requires greatness of soul: the service of truth is the hardest service” (A 50). Art, and the enjoyment of its illusions, can serve as a break from the truth project.

Our ultimate gratitude to art. — Had we not approved of the arts and invented this type of cult of the untrue, the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science [...] would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now our honesty has a counterforce that helps us avoid such consequences: art, as the *good* will to appearance [...] As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable to us [...] At times we need to have a rest from

¹¹See also D 9; GS 143; BGE 2, 261–262; GM II:2; A 54; WP 975 [1885–1886].

¹²See also HH 3, 4; GS 1, 107, 301; CW E; WP 505 [1885–1886]. For discussion see Poellner 2007, 2012, Anderson 2012, Katsafanas 2013b. See also Mandelbaum 1955 for an insightful, though often neglected, discussion in the ethics literature.

¹³For extensive discussion of the threat of nihilism, see Reginster 2006. See also Kaufmann 1974: ch. 3; Nehamas 1985: 70–72, 91, 123–4, 144–5; Langsam 1997: 238–45; Richardson 2004: 254–5, 260; Hussain 2007: 161, 166–7, 2011: 14–15, 50.

ourselves by looking at and down at ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *at* ourselves or crying *at* ourselves; we have to discover the *hero* no less than the *fool* in our passion for knowledge; we must now and then be pleased about our folly in order to be able to stay pleased about our wisdom! And precisely because we are at bottom grave and serious human beings and more weights than human beings, nothing does us as much good as the *fool's cap*: we need it against ourselves — we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish, and blissful art lest we lose that *freedom over things* that our ideal demands of us. It would be a *relapse* for us, with our irritable honesty, to get completely caught up in morality and, for the sake of the overly severe demands that we there make on ourselves, to become virtuous monsters and scare-crows. (GS 107)

However, appreciating art in this way needn't involve "experienc[ing] the evaluative illusion" (Hussain 2007: 171) of pretending that there are attitude-independent values. Even in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's vision is of an "artistic Socrates" (BT 14; cf. GS P:3–4; WP 795 [1885–1886]). The appreciation of "*appearance as appearance*" (KSA 7.29[17] [1873]) is in the service of the truth project, and is subject to a higher-order aim for truth.¹⁴

Our discussion of Nietzsche's epistemic constraints on value creation (§2) highlights an important shortcoming in fictionalist interpretations. Hussain may be right that having honest fictions is compatible with striving for truth (2007: 168–70). But consider the force of 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 (D 9, 108; GS 110; WP 20 [1887]; more on this below). 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]; cf. n. 11). Fictionalism is incongruous with these features of Nietzsche's writings.

Though Hussain rightly emphasizes the palliative role of art in responding to practical nihilism, this isn't Nietzsche's only, or even primary, purpose for art. Art,

¹⁴See also BT 5, 24; HH P:1; GS P:4, 299, 301; GM III:25; TI IX:24. The development of Nietzsche's views on the relation between art and truth is complex, and I cannot do justice to it here. See esp. Young 1992.

construed as a break from the truth project, only has a purpose given our psychological constraints. The strongest individuals wouldn't need a break from the difficulties caused by knowledge of the truths uncovered by genealogy, nor would they even want such a break. We need a more complete picture of the various roles for art in Nietzsche's positive project of creating new values. Before addressing this issue, I would like to get an alternative response to our interpretive puzzle on the table. In the next section I will argue that the proposed alternative interpretation elucidates a further, often underappreciated, role for art.

4 Nietzschean constructivism

The last section identified several challenges facing a fictionalist response to our interpretive puzzle from §2. First, attributing an error theory to Nietzsche is undermotivated by the textual evidence. Nietzsche's claims that nothing is valuable in itself needn't imply a semantic view about the conventional meaning of normative language. Second, a fictionalist interpretation cannot take at face value Nietzsche's claims about value creation. Fictionalism's metaphysics is in tension with the idea that the free spirits genuinely *create* values. We should prefer an interpretation that captures how certain things are genuinely valuable — though not “in themselves” — and how the free spirits are somehow responsible for this. Further, though there is an important connection, for Nietzsche, between art and value creation, we need an interpretation that allows art to play more than a palliative role. Value creation is initiated, not out of weakness and as a break from the truth project, but out of strength and as a component of it.

These difficulties facing fictionalist interpretations provide desiderata for a more adequate account. In this section I will argue that interpreting Nietzsche as a *metaethical constructivist* better captures the features of his normative and metanormative position discussed in §§2–3. The aim isn't to develop this interpretation in detail; I begin that task elsewhere (Silk 2015b). The goal is simply to introduce a promising, and often neglected, interpretive option, and to delineate some of its potential features. I leave developments of the general kind of constructivist interpretation described here for future work.

4.1 Metaethical constructivism: What?

Constructivism, as I will understand it, is a metaethical view about the nature of normative properties in general.¹⁵ Constructivism doesn't 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 probabilifies normative truths, or a supervenience claim about what fixes normative truths. Rather, constructivism answers the following sorts of questions: Fundamentally, what, if anything, grounds that something is non-instrumentally valuable? Or that something is a reason for someone to do something? The notions of fundamentality and ground at play are metaphysical; they are the same as those used in claims like that Socrates is more fundamental than his singleton {Socrates}, that physical properties ground mental properties, etc. Constructivism is a metaphysical view about *what it is* to be good, wrong, desirable, etc.

Constructivism treats normative properties as *attitude-dependent* in the sense from §3: it treats normative facts as grounded in facts about the (possibly counterfactual) evaluative attitudes of agents. Normative facts 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 (or agents') evaluative attitudes, where constructivist theories may differ on what agent is (or class of agents are) "relevant" and what the relevant sense of "coherence" is. Treating values as grounded in agents' evaluative attitudes leaves room for how agents can be normatively mistaken, though only in certain ways. What an agent values and what she has reason to promote can come apart, but only if she is mistaken about the relevant evaluative attitudes (or perhaps about the non-normative facts (§3)).

This general characterization of metaethical constructivism raises many questions. For instance: What is the relevant agent or class of agents whose evaluative attitudes ground normative facts? What is the exact grounding relation between the normative facts and the facts about agents' evaluative attitudes? What is the relevant sense in which correct normative judgments "cohere" with the relevant evaluative attitudes? For present purposes we can leave open Nietzsche's views, to the extent he had any, on such questions (see Silk 2015b: §4 for discussion). While Nietzsche

¹⁵I will focus primarily on practical normative properties. The label 'constructivism' has been applied to various kinds of views, not all of which may count as constructivist in my sense. Though I will couch the discussion in terms of the notion of ground, this is inessential. Readers who prefer to understand these issues in other terms may recast the discussion accordingly (e.g., in terms of reduction, constitution, identity). For developments and critical discussion of metaethical constructivism, see, e.g., Korsgaard 1996, Street 2008a, 2010, Lenman & Shemmer 2012.

may not have had a fully worked out constructivist theory, in the remainder of this section I will argue that attributing to Nietzsche even just a general form of constructivism elucidates various aspects of his overall evaluative perspective.

4.2 Solving the interpretive puzzle

Interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist provides an improved response to our interpretive puzzle from §2. First, we can make sense of Nietzsche's claims that nothing is valuable *in itself*, i.e., independent of agents' attitudes. The constructivist wholeheartedly agrees that values don't "constitute the essence and heart of things" (HH 4), that they are not "eternal and unconditioned" (GS 115), and so on. There are no normative facts that hold independently of human evaluative attitudes.

Second, despite denying that there are attitude-independent normative properties, constructivism still affirms that there are normative properties. Attitude-dependent properties aren't second-rate as properties. If we interpret Nietzsche as accepting attitude-dependence, there is 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. Even if there cannot be attitude-independent reasons for adopting one value over another, there can be genuine reasons all the same. Values needn't have an agent-external source to be genuinely normative.

Third, constructivism provides a precise interpretation of Nietzsche's claims that the new philosophers "create" values. The new philosophers create values not in the sense that they 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. Rather, Nietzsche's talk of value creation can be understood metaphysically in terms of attitude-dependence. There is a question of what the precise class of agents is, according to Nietzsche, whose attitudes ground normative facts, but at minimum it's clear that the new philosophers are among them. Insofar as values are grounded in the new philosophers' evaluative attitudes, there is a real sense in which the new philosophers can create genuine values. By coming to value new things in the descriptive sense — by coming to have evaluative attitudes toward different objects — the new philosophers can thereby create values in the normative sense — values that make legitimate claims on us, those which we ought to, or have reason to, promote.

In this way, interpreting Nietzsche as a metaethical constructivist helps make sense of the seemingly conflicting aspects of his normative and metanormative stance. We can reconcile Nietzsche's claims that nothing is valuable in itself with his engage-

ment in normative discourse and his calls for the free spirits to create new genuine values. This constructivist resolution of our interpretive puzzle avoids the shortcomings of Hussain's fictionalist account. Constructivism is a metaphysical thesis about the nature of normativity; it is neutral on (e.g.) the semantics of normative language. A constructivist interpretation correctly locates Nietzsche's primary metanormative interest, not in the conventional meaning of natural language, but in the nature and metaphysics of value. In what follows I will argue that a constructivist interpretation also helps capture the further considerations which Hussain appeals to in motivating his fictionalist interpretation: Nietzsche's views on practical nihilism, art, and value creation. A constructivist interpretation can shed new light on these issues in the context of Nietzsche's overall philosophical project.

4.3 Nihilism, art, and value creation

Let's start by reexamining the contrast between Nietzsche's apparent error-theoretic claims and his endorsements of values. *Pace* Clark & Dudrick 2007, this contrast isn't indicative of a shift in Nietzsche's views or in his target linguistic domain. The apparently error-theoretic passages continue throughout Nietzsche's late-period writings (see nn. 3–4), and no particular type of normative claim is vindicated.¹⁶ Rather, I suggest that the relevant shift is *dialectical*. It is a shift from a negative claim and resulting question — “Attitude-independence is false! Now what?” — to a positive response to that question — “Embrace attitude-dependence and create new values!”

An 1888 note is illuminating:

The supreme values in whose service man *should* live [...] — these *social values* were erected over man to strengthen their voice, as if they were commands of God, as “reality,” as the “true” world, as a hope and *future* world. Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems “meaningless” — but that is only a *transitional stage*. (WP 7 [1888])

Nietzsche's apparently error-theoretic and nihilistic claims don't reflect his ultimate normative or metanormative view. They characterize a “transitional stage” — namely, *from* an acceptance of attitude-independence *to* a reaffirmation of values consequent on accepting attitude-dependence. In the first stage, Nietzsche takes on board the assumption of attitude-independence in order to educe for his audience its nihilistic implications. If one assumes that genuine values must have an attitude-independent

¹⁶For further discussion, see Hussain 2007: 162; 2011: 10, 46–48; 2012a: 115n.14; 2012b: 123–8.

source, accepting that nothing is valuable in itself raises the threat of disorientation and despair: “The nihilistic question ‘for what?’ is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded *from outside* — by some [...] authority that can *speak unconditionally* and *command* goals and tasks” (WP 20 [1887]). Surveying the apparent “ultimate goallessness of man,” our actions can acquire “the character of useless squandering”; life can seem “meaningless” (HH 33).

This first stage is essential for realizing Nietzsche’s ultimate aim of motivating the “nascent higher types” (Leiter 2002) into an unqualified affirmation of life. Nietzsche’s crucial contribution is that we can overcome practical nihilism by appreciating that there *are* values, and that they are “created” by us. Reengaging in normative discourse and practice requires first embracing a new view about the nature of value: that value is fundamentally attitude-dependent. We should expect Nietzsche to make bald evaluative claims — as he does — when the threat of nihilism is no longer a live possibility, or at least when he is trying to *exclude* it from being treated as a live possibility through his very act of valuing. This latter context is important. In expressing his values in full awareness of their attitude-dependent status, Nietzsche assumes that values can be genuinely normative even if non-objective. Via a familiar process of conversational accommodation (Stalnaker 2014), Nietzsche can thereby encourage the nascent higher types to accept this assumption for themselves (cf. Silk 2015a: §§3.3.3, 5.2.4). No longer threatened by nihilism, they can then become free spirits and herald the creation of new values. This initiates a positive project of creating new life-affirming values, accepted in full view of their metaphysical dependence on human evaluative attitudes. Theoretical inquiry into the nature of value motivates a practical reformation in how to live.

We saw in §3 how art can play a palliative role in responding to the threat of nihilism. Our constructivist interpretation brings into relief an additional role for art, the importance of which extends beyond the “transitional stage” of WP 7. We can “learn from artists” how to engage the affects in securing an acceptance of attitude-dependence and in effecting changes in others’ evaluative perspectives.

Nietzsche, astute psychologist that he is, realizes that in order to counteract values, beliefs, habits, etc. entrenched by social selection and the herd instinct, we must engage our drives and affects, not just our explicit beliefs. “[I]nasmuch as [rigorous science] is incapable of making any essential inroad into the power of habits of feeling acquired in primeval times,” it is limited in its ability to affect motivation (HH 16; cf. GS 301, 345, BGE 264). Even if we come to know propositionally that attitude-independence is false, the longterm effects of this knowledge throughout our psyches may be limited. Though we must “*learn to think differently*,” stability in reorienting our overall frame of mind requires that we learn “*to feel differently*” (D

103; cf. A 54). It is in securing this affective reorientation that art can play a vital role: “what does all art do? does it not praise? glorify? choose? prefer? With all this it strengthens or weakens certain valuations [... This is] the very presupposition of the artist’s ability” (TI IX:24). Aesthetic experience engages our drives and affects *directly*. Art can thus target the affective roots of our belief in attitude-independence, and help dislodge it at its physiological/psychological core.¹⁷ Learning from artists how to engage the affects, the free spirits can give causal presence to their belief in attitude-dependence and solidify their knowledge in new impulses, feelings, habits, and practices.

This role for art sheds light on Nietzsche’s occasional penchant for strong rhetoric. By expressing his values with his characteristic zeal, Nietzsche can reinforce to the nascent higher types how values needn’t be independent of human attitudes to have genuine normative force and authority, and can mitigate the forces threatening the free spirits’ creative potential: “no longer the humble expressions, ‘everything is merely subjective,’ but ‘it is also *our* work! — Let us be proud of it!’” (WP 1059 [1884]).¹⁸ Nietzsche’s rhetorical style can thus be seen as an instrument in the “*task of assimilating knowledge* and making it instinctive” (GS 11; cf. 110, 113). We might even see Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence and the poetically described “*amor fati*” in this light: we might see them as mechanisms for solidifying an affirmation of value without the metaphysical fictions uncovered by genealogy.¹⁹ Nietzsche’s new philosophers aren’t paralyzed by the contingency, risk, and provisionality in creating values and then fully embracing them.

A constructivist interpretation gives additional meaning to the rhetorical aspect of Nietzsche’s style. Constructivism treats normative properties as grounded in human evaluative attitudes. Hence, in changing his readers’ attitudes, Nietzsche may also change what their normative reasons are, what is genuinely valuable for them, etc. Given that one can come to value things non-consciously,²⁰ Nietzsche can effect this normative change without the reader’s even needing to realize it. There is a benign sense in which such use of rhetoric is par for the course in ethics; it is commonplace to use “examples and a bit of tendentious rhetoric” (Railton 2010: 87) to

¹⁷See also Z II:15; NCW 2; TI IX:10; WP 800 [1888], 809 [1888]. For discussion of Nietzsche’s views on the physiology of art, see Moore 2002: ch. 2; Richardson 2004: 227–35. On the affective roots of moral values, see D 34, 35, 99; GS 57; see also n. 12.

¹⁸See also GS 143, 335, 374; Z I:17; BGE 208; WP 568 [1888]. Cf. n. 11.

¹⁹See GS 341; Z III:2,13,16, IV:19; BGE 56; TI X:4,5; EH II:10, BT:2,3, Z:1,6. For similar takes, see Richardson 1996: 256; 2004: 196–7; Langsam 1997: 244–5; Reginster 2006: 13–15, ch. 5; Railton 2012: 46–47. See also Nehamas 1985, Janaway 2007.

²⁰See, e.g., D 119; GS 11, 354; BGE 3, 19, 187; WP 387 [1887–1888], 440 [1888].

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 more radical: changing the attitudes of the free spirits and, *in virtue of doing so*, changing what normative facts apply to them.

5 Value creation and evaluative attitudes

So far we have focused on fictionalist and constructivist approaches to certain of Nietzsche's views on value and evaluative attitudes. In this section I would like to briefly examine several alternative interpretive options. This will help clarify the extent of Nietzsche's metaethical developments, and situate Nietzsche's views in the landscape of contemporary metaethical theories.

First, Paul Katsafanas (2011, 2013a) has argued that we can resolve the interpretive puzzle from §2 by treating Nietzsche as a *constitutivist*:

[P]ower is not an objective value, in the sense that it would not have value independently of a particular feature of human activities. Rather, we are committed to valuing power merely in virtue of acting, because power is the constitutive aim of action. Thus, power has a privileged normative status. Moreover, there is a sense in which the value of power is created by human activity: the structure of our own actions commits us to valuing power. (2013a: 182; cf. 163)

Insofar as power is the constitutive aim of action, we, as actors, are committed to its being valuable. Hence, power, though "not an objective value," has a "privileged normative status" (2011: 634–5).

Katsafanas's Nietzschean Constitutivism attempts to justify our commitment to thinking that power is valuable (cf. 2013a: 1, 238). But an account of what justifies our commitment to the value of power needn't imply an account of what grounds the value of power. Suppose we accept that power is valuable, and that what justifies our thinking this is that power is a constitutive aim of action. This leaves open the question of what makes it the case that power is valuable. One *might* treat the value of power as grounded in our very commitment to it. But such a move, while natural, isn't forced upon us. Katsafanas's Nietzschean Constitutivism is consistent with the claim that power is valuable because it instantiates some other irreducible, attitude-independent property. The fact that power is a constitutive aim of action could justify our commitment to the value of power without being what grounds the value of power. The constitutive aim might simply track the value of power.

Hence one might worry whether Katsafanas's interpretation captures the apparently metaphysical nature of Nietzsche's claims about value creation. More needs to be said to justify that establishing that we are committed to valuing power counts as establishing that "[we create] the value of power" (2011: 635).

Even if Katsafanas's constitutivist interpretation doesn't ultimately resolve our initial interpretive puzzle, doing so isn't the only advertised feature of the view. Katsafanas provides rich developments of various aspects of Nietzsche's views on value and evaluative thought — e.g., in ethics, concerning the nature and possible universality of intrinsic value; in epistemology, concerning what justifies us in accepting certain values; in action theory, concerning the nature of action and agency; and in philosophical psychology, concerning the nature of normative judgment, and the relations among conscious and unconscious valuing, willing, affects, and drives. Whether the interpretation necessarily provides a metaphysical account of the relation between value and evaluative attitudes is less clear.

Similar remarks hold for interpretations that might appear to incorporate Nietzsche's valuing of power into a *metaethical naturalist* account which reduces value to power (cf. Kaufmann 1974, Wilcox 1974, Schacht 1983, Hunt 1991, Richardson 1996, 2004, Langsam 1997, Reginster 2006). It is important to distinguish axiological questions about what is valuable from metaethical questions about what makes it the case that something is valuable. One could accept that power is the only non-instrumental value while accepting that what makes this the case is that power grounds (constitutes, determines, is identical to) the property of being valuable (*attitude-independent naturalism*); or that (certain, all) agents would value power in reflective equilibrium (*attitude-dependent naturalism*); or that power instantiates some irreducibly normative property (*non-naturalism*). Privileging the value of (e.g.) power is thus compatible with various types of metaethical naturalism, and even with non-naturalism. For this reason it isn't always clear whether the interpretations cited above ascribe to Nietzsche a genuinely metaethical view about the metaphysics of value. (Richardson 1996 is perhaps clearest on this, referring to Nietzsche's "external-realist intent.")

The final kind of interpretation of Nietzsche's metaethics that I will consider here is a *non-cognitivist* interpretation, as defended in Clark & Dudrick 2007.²¹ To a first approximation, non-cognitivism claims that normative judgments don't, by their nature, represent how the world is. Clark & Dudrick argue that while Nietzsche

²¹See Hussain 2011, 2012b for further discussion. Non-cognitivism, as I understand it, is principally a thesis about the nature of normative thought; however, it is typically associated with a broadly expressivist semantics of normative language. Since Clark & Dudrick present non-cognitivism as a view about discourse, I will couch the points in linguistic terms.

accepted a cognitivist error theory in *Human, All-Too-Human*, he rejected this view in favor of non-cognitivism by the time of the *Gay Science*. Their principal evidence for this comes from certain passages in the *Gay Science* — in particular, the selections from GS 299 and 301 examined in §§1–4. Our previous discussions cast doubt on ascribing non-cognitivism to Nietzsche on the basis of these passages.

Non-cognitivism is a semantic view about the conventional contents of normative claims, and, likewise, the nature of normative beliefs. As contemporary developments have underscored,²² this semantic thesis is neutral on questions about the nature of normative properties. Indeed, a central aim of many non-cognitivists — so-called “quasi-realists” — has been to show how non-cognitivism is compatible with accepting the attitude-*independence* of value. 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; cf. Leiter 2008: 5). Evidence that Nietzsche took there to be *some* connection between motivational attitudes and evaluative judgments isn’t sufficient for treating him as a non-cognitivist. As we have seen, the questions of principal interest to Nietzsche aren’t semantic questions, but questions about the nature and grounds of value (§§3–4).

Clark & Dudrick’s main motivation for pursuing a non-cognitivist interpretation is a desire to avoid attributing an implausible “subjectivism” to Nietzsche (e.g., 2007: 205). Subjectivism accepts attitude-dependence: it treats value as grounded in psychological properties of agents. Yet the kinds of subjectivist theories under consideration — not just by Clark & Dudrick, but also in the broader literature — have been crude. As we saw in our preliminary discussion of constructivism, a subjectivist view needn’t identify what is valuable with what an agent happens to value. And it needn’t treat all evaluative claims on a par.²³ There are more sophisticated ways of capturing the dependence of value on evaluative attitudes that avoids these counterintuitive consequences (Silk 2015b).

6 Conclusion

Let’s recap. We started with an interpretive puzzle concerning how to reconcile Nietzsche’s apparent systematic rejection of evaluative claims, on the one hand, with his

²²E.g., Blackburn 1993, Gibbard 2003.

²³For similar attributions, see also Nehamas 1985, Langsam 1997, Leiter 2002, Richardson 2004, Reginger 2006, Katsafanas 2011.

engagement in evaluative discourse and injunctions to create values, on the other. Examining this apparent tension in Nietzsche's overall evaluative perspective has led us to consider a range of normative and metanormative issues — for instance, concerning the nature of value, the metaphysics of normative properties, the connection between value and evaluative attitudes, the justification of normative beliefs, the psychology of motivational and evaluative attitudes, and the semantics of normative language. Delineating these issues can help clarify the nature and extent of Nietzsche's metaethical commitments. For instance, while Nietzsche likely didn't have worked out views on the semantics of evaluative language, he certainly did have views on the nature of value. That Nietzsche didn't have a complete metaethical theory needn't keep us from ascribing to him metaethical views.

Specifically, I argued that there are good reasons for ascribing to Nietzsche an account of normative properties as fundamentally attitude-dependent. On the constructivist interpretation outlined here, 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. Accepting the attitude-dependence of value, and appreciating the affective roots of their evaluative commitments, the free spirits can avoid practical nihilism and endorse new life-affirming values.

A nuanced understanding of the space of metaethical possibilities brings into relief plausible normative and metanormative views we can attribute to Nietzsche. Yet there is still much work to be done. For instance, even if it is correct to interpret Nietzsche as accepting some sort of attitude-dependent account of value and normativity, the details of such an interpretation have been largely underexplored. The sketch of a constructivist interpretation in §4 raises many questions. How exactly are different types of normative properties grounded in evaluative attitudes? Whose attitudes matter? What is the psychological nature of the relevant evaluative attitudes? Why should we think these attitudes are suitable for grounding genuine value? Can we capture Nietzsche's epistemic constraints on value while respecting its attitude-dependent status? Is anything in Nietzsche's view of interest to contemporary theorizing? (See Silk 2015b for initial developments.) Further, for concreteness I focused primarily on certain metaphysical aspects of Nietzsche's metaethics, largely ignoring his views on the epistemology of value and the psychology of evaluative judgment. Integrating Nietzsche's metaethics with his normative ethics, epistemology, and philosophical psychology, as well as with contemporary literatures on these subjects, promises fruitful avenues to explore.

As I hope our preliminary discussion indicates, there is much to be gained in investigating Nietzsche's metaethics. Examining Nietzsche's views on value and nor-

maturity provides yet another example of the complexity and synthesis of his overall philosophical and evaluative perspective. Nietzsche might not have made it to the “heyday of analytic metaethics” (Darwall et al. 1992). But that doesn’t mean he wasn’t ahead of his time.

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Related Topics

8 Nietzsche’s values; 9 Will to power; 11 Nietzsche and contemporary work in practical reason; 15 Nihilism, the death of God, and the affirmation of life; 20 Human greatness and the higher individual; 22 Nietzsche’s account of agency; 26 Drives and affects; 28 Nietzsche and contemporary work in philosophical psychology; 30 Perspectivism and Nietzsche’s epistemology; 33 Music

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