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The Demandingness of Morality: A Nietzschean Approach

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

by

Tom Hanauer-Rehavia

June 2022

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Acknowledgments

I started this dissertation during the spring of 2020; I defended my prospectus in very late May; the horrific murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis occurred just a few days before, and a wave of protests began spreading over the continent; no vaccine for COVID-19 was yet in sight; by September, California had its worst wildfire in recorded history (worse *yet*), while enormous chunks of the Amazon were engulfed in unprecedented flames as well; and, meanwhile, the USA's ruling class—always acting in the best interest of capital—was busy gaslighting people, i.e., telling them *there's no problem!* or *don't worry, we're handling the problem!*

How does one *not* drown in nihilistic despair at all this? I really don't know. This dissertation is partly an attempt to see whether Nietzsche's work might assist us in addressing that. *But* I do know that *I* would've sooner succumbed to such despair if it weren't for two sources of support I enjoyed while writing this dissertation: (1) my family; and (2) UCR's incredible philosophy department, and especially the wonderful philosophers on my committee: Eric, Coleen, Andy, and Maude. In particular, I must acknowledge a special, decade-long debt of gratitude to Maudemarie Clark, who has left the profoundest influence on me since (by happy accident) I first discovered her 1990 book, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, in my undergraduate library.

For *Taya, Kimi, David, and Dafna.*

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Demandingness of Morality: A Nietzschean Approach

by

Tom Hanauer-Rehavia

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Philosophy
University of California, Riverside, June 2022
Dr. Maudemarie Clark, Co-Chairperson
Dr. Andrews Reath, Co-Chairperson

Nietzsche is often interpreted as an important precursor to contemporary moral philosophers, like Bernard Williams and Susan Wolf, who criticize morality for its demandingness. I argue that Nietzsche agrees with the claim that morality is extremely demanding. But, contra Williams, Wolf, and the "demandingness critics," I also argue that Nietzsche recognized the positive value of morality's demandingness rather than launching a wholesale condemnation of it. Finally, and from a Nietzschean point of view, I argue that the attack on moral demandingness in contemporary ethics could be plausibly read as an expression of the kind of nihilism Nietzsche feared and combatted.

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Abbreviations

1. Nietzsche

The Birth of Tragedy (BT)
Untimely Meditations (UM)
Human, All Too Human, Vol. I (HH I)
Human, All Too Human, Vol. II, Assorted Opinions and Maxims (AOM)
Human, All Too Human Vol II, The Wanderer and his Shadow (WS)
Daybreak (D)
The Gay Science (GS)
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Chapter 1

Moral Demandingness: A Conceptual Map

The most astonishing response I have ever received from a student happened several years ago while teaching the infamous argument from Peter Singer's classic 1972 paper, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," in an introductory philosophy course. Singer argues that Western folks—the Affluent—have robust and counterintuitively demanding moral obligations towards globally distant, desperately needy strangers, e.g., ones suffering from preventable diseases and maladies, like famine and malaria. I typically expect students to disagree with Singer's conclusion; they're understandably resistant to the claim that 'affluent' Westerners are doing something wrong by spending their spare cash on movies, fashionable clothes, pizzas, and even good philosophy books, rather than sending it off to established aid-providing organizations like Oxfam and UNICEF instead. They also, however, find it difficult to justify their intuition that this is so. Students tend to offer the common arguments that moral

philosophers have become accustomed to hearing and rebutting: the needy strangers are "too far away;"[1] it's not "fair"[2] that we should be required to do more just because others are doing less; our "special obligations" towards co-nationals, friends, family, and ourselves are more important than duties to non-nationals; and shouldn't this be the responsibility of the government anyway? Sometimes the students capitulate and concede that, perhaps, Singer's argument isn't a total flop; maybe we do have some moral obligations to the global poor that we're systematically failing to discharge. But the astonishing response from my shrewd student—call her Liv—was neither capitulation nor excuse. It was a stark embrace of moral nihilism. Moral *nihilism*, not moral relativism. Liv wasn't arguing that rightness or wrongness is culture-dependent or even a matter of individual preference. She claimed that morality simply has no rightful grip, no legitimate authority, over human beings whatsoever. According to Liv, the decrees of morality, its oughts and shoulds, its demands and commands, are baseless and erroneous. Morality is at best empty, at worst, a hoax.

Liv was surely trying to be provocative. But that doesn't mean she's wrong. It seemed to me, rather, that she had astutely placed her finger on a potentially serious, philosophically compelling, and even quite troubling dilemma. Liv agreed that the argument for morality's demandingness works, *if* we can accept the premise that certain classes of other-regarding moral obligations are real and binding; and it's precisely the latter that she was denying. In Liv's philosophical universe, we can either (1) *deny* morality and thereby escape its demands and their extremity, or (2) we can accept morality but thereby be forced into recognizing the

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[1] But see Frances Kamm, "Does Distance Matter Morally to the Duty of Rescue?" (2000).

[2] See Liam Murphy (2000) on the fairness argument, and Garrett Cullity (2004) for a compelling rebuttal.

inescapability of its demands and their extremity. The only viable avenue for escaping the demandingness of morality, she thought, is to deny it altogether. There's no middle. There's no undemanding or semi-demanding or quasi-demanding morality—it's either very, perhaps even impossibly demanding, or it is not morality at all. That is the dilemma, that is the choice. I call this the ultimate dilemma of moral demandingness, or the *ultimate dilemma* for short.

I think that the ultimate dilemma is genuine. If we accept basic, uncontroversial, 'moderate-sounding' moral principles (like those roughly formulated by Singer), then we'll find we cannot avoid the conclusion that morality imposes severe demands on agents; perhaps not *all* agents, but certainly, I think, many. This conclusion can be avoided, but only at the cost of abandoning morality. I cannot, however, defend such an audacious thesis here. Instead, in this dissertation, I propose to examine the dilemma via the philosopher who, I believe, understood it—and its potentially grave implications—better than anyone else before and (perhaps) since: Friedrich Nietzsche. The ultimate dilemma is nascently encapsulated in Nietzsche's astonishing claim that morality is "anti-life" (e.g., BT P: §5). To affirm the demands of morality, he suggests, is to oppose the demands of life. So much the worse for morality then, on Nietzsche's view? Not necessarily. In Nietzsche's case, matters are more complicated than they seem. But this will have to wait for the chapters to come.

There is, however, a bourgeoning cottage industry of work on moral demandingness. Thus, one might reasonably ask: Why take a historical approach at all? Simply put, the Hegelian in me thinks that contemporary philosophical issues cannot be grasped fully and successfully outside of their historical contexts. As one contemporary Hegelian writes, "Philosophy and the history of philosophy are one. You cannot do the first without also doing the second … [It] is essential to an adequate understanding of certain problems, questions, issues, that one

understands them genetically."[3] The complete history of moral demandingness would, I think, require a return to the Greeks. The shades of the contemporary problem are discoverable in Plato and Aristotle's concerns about the congruence between virtue and *eudaimonia*. But because such a project is for a lifetime rather than a dissertation, I have narrowed the scope to a figure who, I think, can fruitfully illuminate the issue of moral demandingness—a figure who has also been conspicuously and surprisingly *absent* from the contemporary literature on this issue. To appreciate the significance and surprisingness of the neglect of Nietzsche, let me turn to the current debate.

The contemporary philosopher who is perhaps most responsible for the debate about moral demandingness is Bernard Williams. The *locus classicus* of the contemporary literature is Williams' 1973 essay[4] where he offers an objection—which has subsequently come to be known as the *integrity objection*—to act utilitarianism.[5] For Williams, the demandingness of act utilitarianism undermines the agent's "integrity," or her capacity to have real commitments and "ground projects" that give her life a sense of 'wholeness,' meaning, and worth. This argument, to which I'll return in the next chapter, has been examined in numerous articles and books since Williams' original articulation in the 70's. Now, although it is well-known that Williams was influenced deeply by Nietzsche,[6] the extent to which his critique of morality's *demandingness*

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[3] Charles Taylor, "Philosophy and its History," (1985, 17).

[4] J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: for and against* (1973)

[5] It could be suggested that the modern debate has another source, namely, Singer's argument for famine relief (1972). I think that's correct, in a sense. Singer's article launched the question about how demanding morality is; but, with Williams, we encounter demandingness for the first time as a *distinctive objection* to a moral theory. These aren't the same debate, though they're not unrelated. Singer doesn't explore whether demandingness could itself be an objection to a moral theory or principle.

[6] It is often claimed that many of those philosophers that Leiter (1997) calls "Morality Critics," e.g., Williams, Wolf, Stocker, etc. are the heirs of Nietzsche, whether or not they've been directly influenced by him (see Louden 1988).

is also Nietzschean hasn't been appreciated at all in this body of literature. As we'll see in Chapter 2, the only scholar who has so far substantively engaged with this subject, i.e., Brian Leiter (2019a, 2007, 1997), has in fact denied that Nietzsche had a serious interest in the topic. One aim of this dissertation is to prove otherwise. I'll argue that the demandingness of morality is a topic that informed Nietzsche's genealogy of morality—his account of what makes morality *morality*—as well as his critique of morality. The primary aim of this dissertation is to articulate Nietzsche's conception of the demandingness of morality and its relevance to his evaluation of morality; but I adopt these aims with an eye towards examining whether Nietzsche can contribute anything to the debate today over moral demandingness, e.g., a better understanding of Williams' conception of and objections to the "morality system." In Chapter 4, I will argue that he does and can make some relevant contributions.

But, in the present chapter, I would like to provide some clarification about the debate over the demandingness of morality; to zero in on the issue that's at stake in the *ultimate dilemma*. First, what's the concept of moral demandingness? As we will see, there are different senses that should be distinguished. This will help isolate the kind of moral demandingness that we are interested in examining. The question that we are interested in addressing is, at its core, whether morality requires us to live thoroughly self-sacrificial lives, as Singer (1972) roughly suggests. In some respect, then, this is a modern offshoot of the foundational question in ethics, the Socratic question: How should I live? (Cf. Williams 1985, Chapter 1). Second, I want to examine how different moral *theories* handle this question. I'll focus especially on Kantianism, utilitarianism, and Schopenhauer's compassion-centric ethics. I focus on these three because of their relevance to Nietzsche, but also because they (minus Schopenhauer) are the primary targets of Williams' critique of morality. I don't discuss these theories as dead

antiquarian curiosities, though. I examine the real implications these theories have on the demandingness of morality. For this reason, I'll make ample use of contemporary literature too. The discussion of these theories aims to motivate the need for investigating the problem of moral demandingness, but also to provide some foundation for thinking that the ultimate dilemma might be true.

1. The Varieties of Moral Demandingness

The notion of moral demandingness is complex. I'll begin with some distinctions between different senses of the term. These senses are easily conflated, and their contents can in some cases overlap. The distinctions are therefore somewhat artificial, but they'll clarify and isolate the sense of "moral demandingness" that is our target. There are at least five different senses that can be differentiated:

- **<u>Metaphysical</u>**: Demandingness in the metaphysical sense concerns the very notion of a moral "demand" and its metaphysical presuppositions. How can morality have an imperatival force? What's the nature of moral obligation? What kind of thing must it be in order for a moral demand to be objectively and inescapably binding?[7]

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[7] G. E. M. Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" and J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977) are examples of a critical engagement with the metaphysical notion of demandingness. They challenge the claim that moral obligations have a categorical imperatival force ("demandingness") that isn't conditioned by contingent human desires, practices, norms, institutions, etc. Anscombe writes, "the concepts of obligation, and duty—*moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say—and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense of "ought," ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it" (1958, 1).

- **Psychological**: Demandingness in the psychological sense refers to the psychological mechanisms that make it possible for someone to recognize, issue, and act on moral demands. In what ways moral demands are mentally *registered* by persons? How are moral claims understood and treated as demands or obligations? Do moral demands engage us emotionally or purely cognitively?

- **Phenomenological**: Demandingness in the phenomenological sense is similar but not identical to the psychological. It's not about how morality's demands are cognitively registered and understood, but about the *first-personal experience* of moral demands. This is the dimension of demandingness that's the central object in works like Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*, for instance.

- **Instrumental**: The instrumental sense of demandingness refers to the difficulty that an agent encounters in relation to a specific task. For instance, undergraduates usually find it very demanding to read a single page of Hegel, mountain climbers find it demanding to ascend Mount Everest, etc. Instrumental demandingness is a function of the effort a person must expend to achieve a particular goal.

- **Normative**: Finally, in the normative sense, the concept of demandingness concerns a characteristic of the relation between the Right and the Good, and specifically about their potential for *conflict* and *harmonization*. Thus, although climbing mount Everest is instrumentally demanding for a mountaineer, it is not normatively demanding because (a) it is not required by the Right and (b) in the mountaineer's case, it doesn't conflict with her Good and, in fact, might even be partly constitutive of her Good.

Demandingness in the Normative Sense—DNS—is the target we're interested in. That's what the *ultimate dilemma* is about. It is, I think, uncontroversial that the demands of morality can come into conflict with one's personal or self-interested desires and projects. This, at least, is the commonsense view of ordinary morality. I might prefer to spend my Saturday in bed, but I promised my colleague I'd take care of her cat while she's away visiting her parents. What should I do? I should keep my promise, of course, even if that's not what I really want to do. These sorts of conflicts are eminently familiar. There is simply no guarantee that what morality requires me to do, e.g., keeping a promise, will coincide with what I might desire to do at any particular moment. The Moderns really do differ from the Ancients in this respect. For Plato and Aristotle, living virtuously is living happily or flourishing. But, although we moderns don't accept the perfect co-incidence of morality and happiness, commonsense moral thought also readily recognizes that there are genuine *limits* to morality's demands. I am not—and, according to commonsense, I *cannot* be—morally required to organize or arrange my whole life in a manner that seeks only to promote the greatest welfare of others rather than prioritizing (to some extent) my own personal welfare. There is, to appropriate Samuel Scheffler's (1982) term, an "agent-centered prerogative" that is built into commonsense morality. Agents are permitted to assign a greater weight to their own personal interests, even at the expense of maximizing the common Good of others. The Right does not tyrannize over the Good. This need not be framed as a *concession* to self-interest on morality's part, i.e., that the Right is 'yielding' to the Good. Rather, it's interpretable as claiming that morality already contains or provides a place for the personal Good within its domain.

But that is the question: Does morality really carve out such a space for the individual? As some philosophers have argued, even commonsense morality itself doesn't seem entirely

settled on the matter. Aren't there some cases where commonsense suggests morality would require us to make certain sacrifices, even serious ones?[8] And, in any case, Singer's argument is based on the acceptance of a commonsense moral principle: if you can prevent something very bad without sacrificing anything of significant moral importance, then you ought (morally) to do so. This principle, coupled with the state of the world, yields the excessively demanding conclusion. There is a conflict in commonsense, then; and we can't reject one aspect of commonsense simply because it conflicts with another aspect. Rather—to appropriate a Kantian line—this is precisely why we must step out of "*common human reason*" and "take a step into the field of *practical philosophy*" (GMM 4:405). In taking this step, two pictures of moral life begin to emerge as potential answers to our question. The first picture answers our question with a "Yes, morality does carve out a personal space." This is the conception we find in the work of Barbara Herman (a Kantian). She writes that,

> a reasonable morality is well integrated into ordinary living, not something we are endlessly at war with … This is not to say that morality is undemanding. Rather, its demandingness is like the demandingness of loving someone: defining the life it is a part of (2000, 31).

The second picture answers with a "No, morality doesn't carve out a robust personal space." This is the conception we find in the work of Shelley Kagan (a consequentialist). He writes that,

> there is no limit to what you might be called upon to sacrifice in the pursuit of the good. Your material possessions, time, effort, bodily parts, or life itself—all of these might be

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[8] Sidgwick claimed that we shouldn't rely on commonsense ("folk morality") because it gets entangled in confusions. He writes that, "the unphilosophic man is apt to hold different principles at once, and to apply different methods in more or less confused combinations" (1907, ME 1.1.3). Cf. Fishkin (1982), Kagan (1989), Slote (1992), and Mulgan (2001) on commonsense morality and its limits and "incoherence."

commandeered by morality, and put to purposes quite unlike those to which you would dedicate them were morality's demands less severe (1989, 21).

Herman and Kagan are both offering opposing conceptions of DNS, two ways of construing the relationship between the Right and the Good, two pictures of morality's place in life vis-à-vis other values and goods. But note, first, a basic agreement: both pictures agree that morality can legitimately interfere or conflict with the 'ordinary flow' of one's life. These conflicts aren't necessarily always cases of "demandingness," though, e.g., it would be odd to label the (negative) moral obligation to refrain from violently striking a child as a "demanding" obligation, even if one would *really, really* like to do so. The desire to hit a child is so terribly illegitimate and worthless that it couldn't possibly constitute a *sacrifice* to let it go unfulfilled. It might disrupt one's subjective flow of life, yet not in a way that anyone would reasonably recognize as being "demanding," even if it is technically *a* demand. Conversely, there seems to be something genuinely "demanding" about, say, the obligation to attend to a seriously injured stranger on the sidewalk, if it means you'll have to miss your best friend's wedding. The moral obligation to help a stranger overrides your desire (and even obligation) to attend your friend's wedding, but we recognize that there is a real sacrifice here, that some of the personal Good has been sacrificed for the sake of the impersonal Right.[9] This is a genuine disruption to the flow of an agent's life, yet a disruption that is entirely warranted.

The disagreement between these two pictures, I take it, pertains to the extent to which moral demands can reasonably and legitimately interfere with this ordinary flow. Herman's

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[9] Regarding the notion of "sacrifice," the following comment from Max Scheler seems apropos: "When one admits merely positive and negative values and different quantities of each, but does not also acknowledge objective scales of value, once can speak only of costs but not of sacrifice. Whoever prefers a greater pleasure to a lesser onr, or a longer-lasting future pleasure to a passing present one of the same kind, or lesser suffering to greater ones, does not thereby make a "sacrifice." He is only carefully estimating the "costs"" (1992, 87).

view, I think, is much closer to commonsense than Kagan's view. Kagan, of course, recognizes this. That's why he labels views of Herman's (2000) sort, which find a place for self-interest within morality's sphere (or that mitigate morality's demands), "*moderate*," and views like his, which suggest that there's no limit to the kinds of sacrifices morality requires, "*extremist*."

The discussion so far suggests that additional distinctions are needed to clarify our target. Specifically, we should distinguish two temporal axes on which moral demandingness can manifest itself. First, there is *Synchronic Demandingness*. Morality can be demanding *at a* specific time, e.g., as when I am obligated to help the stranger and miss the wedding *now*. It is often thought that morality can demand deep sacrificial acts by individuals. I would suggest that the story of the *Akedah* offers such an example: Abraham is required to sacrifice his son to God. Of course, if you don't believe in God, then you won't think anyone could ever be under such a moral obligation from God. (And, even if you have faith, you probably would still agree, I hope.) The "problem" of moral demandingness can be framed in terms of whether morality could ever require us to make such sacrifices in a single act, i.e., synchronically.

This should be distinguished from a second temporal axis along which demandingness appears: morality might require great sacrifices *over* time rather than *at a* time, e.g., we can imagine God requiring Abraham to spend his life sacrificing as many children as possible. This divine command wouldn't be something that requires one to just do something difficult *now*, but to incorporate a demanding activity into the 'flow' of one's life. Let's call this kind of moral demandingness *Diachronic Demandingness*. The example of a fictional infanticidal Abraham is, of course, absurd. Perhaps a better example is afforded by cases of caregiving, e.g., when a person becomes responsible for someone—a spouse, parent, child—with a severe disability and cannot afford to offload the work involved in discharging this responsibility onto others.

These kinds of situations may be tragic, unfair, even unjust, but they are not unimaginable conditions of human life. I think our default assumption is that these kinds of severe cases of diachronic demandingness are unusual, if we think they're even possible at all. They constitute an aberration from the moderate demandingness that is characteristic of ordinary human life.[10] But this assumption fails to appreciate the possibility of an obligation that is synchronically *un*demanding, yet diachronically *very* demanding. That is, an obligation that requires the performance of many small acts, each of which, when taken in isolation, involves little to no sacrifice, but in aggregate involves an enormous sacrifice. This is, I think, the kind of diachronic moral demandingness that emerges from Peter Singer's work.[11] Taken in isolation, there is nothing very demanding about giving up small pleasures and goods—coffee, a movie, a new pair of shoes, etc.—but when cobbled together these small renunciations can amount to a significant loss to the agent's Good. The "problem" of moral demandingness in this case is whether morality could and does demand we make such sacrifices over a lifetime, i.e., diachronically.

The kind of moral demandingness we're interested in is *Diachronic Demandingness*. That is, we are interested in the question: Can one's *whole life*, rather than some temporal slice of it, be "commandeered" by morality and at the expense of one's own Good? In the next Chapter, I will argue that Bernard Williams (1985) articulates a version of diachronic demandingness that, he claims, emerges from what he calls the "morality system;" and I will suggest this form

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[10] van Ackeren and Sticker (2015) attribute this kind of demandingness to Kant's moral philosophy.

[11] Garrett Cullity (2004) presents the most compelling account of this view, I think. He distinguishes between "aggregative" and "iterative" versions of the argument. The latter provide a better motivation for extreme demandingness because it circumvents a common worry (e.g., raised by Paul Gomberg 2002) that we can argue about the kind of *principle* we should derive from Singer's case of the child in the pond.

of moral demandingness is interestingly different from the more well-known kind of demandingness he discusses in his critique of utilitarianism (1973). But before moving on, I want to call attention to another important distinction that will help clarify the *ultimate dilemma*.

As I said, the commonsense view seems to be more on Herman's side than Kagan's. It is on the side of the moderate rather than the extremist. Yet I think there's an ambiguity here that concerns what "extremity" means from the standpoint of commonsense. I suggest that what counts as an "extremely" demanding moral theory for commonsense morality may come apart from what counts as one from the standpoint of moral *philosophy*. To appreciate the difference, let's consider the debate in the consequentialist literature about moral demandingness. Kagan, we saw, endorses extremism; and for him, that means morality is so austere and demanding that it would simply be unrealistic to expect anyone to satisfactorily meet all of its demands. Others, however, like Brad Hooker (2000) and Liam Murphy (2000), argue that Kagan, Singer, Unger, and other extremist-adjacent, consequentialist moral philosophers go too far. We are not required to sacrifice all our time, energy, money, and attention to addressing global woes. It is enough, roughly, if we devote ~10% of our income to such endeavors or no more than our "fair" share. Does this kind of moral theory count as an extremely demanding one? If we're comparing it to Singer, Kagan, et. al., the answer seems to be "no." But, if we compare it with *commonsense*, the answer isn't clear at all. The affluent don't even typically spend 0.5% of their income on any impartial moral project. From the standpoint of commonsense, a moral theory that required persons to spend 10% of their income, which to me seems like a rather arbitrary and conservative number anyway, would involve a major revision to their moral-conceptual scheme and (perhaps) to the 'ordinary flow' of their lives. I suggest, then, that our discussion should be sensitive to the distinction between

philosophical demandingness and *commonsense demandingness*. The latter tends to have much looser boundaries than the former. This should be expected, of course. Commonsense morality isn't the product of clean and clear, *a priori* armchair speculation. It emerges from the swampy, disorganized terrain of ordinary moral life, where our norms, values, and practices are always being negotiated, examined, reexamined, tailored and torn, woven and unwoven into an immense normative web that, as a result of our endless, collective, constructive (and destructive) activity, constitutes our shared form of ethical life. The vagueness and ambiguity of our commonsense conception of moral demandingness is simply a symptom of its dynamism.

The *ultimate dilemma*, as I conceive of it, doesn't depend on the claim that morality is extremely demanding in the philosophical sense. It depends, rather, on the standpoint of our commonsense. Viewed from that standpoint, the demands of morality—upon reflection— will turn out to be extreme. Brian Berky's distinction between *moderation about principles* and *moderation about demands* helps explain the meaning of this. Moderation about principles is the view that the content of moral principles is not "fully impartial," or doesn't require agents to take everyone's interests equally into consideration in action (2016, 3020). Moderation about demands, though, is the view that morality isn't "significantly more demanding" than commonsense assumes in the world we (Affluent) inhabit (ibid). The *ultimate dilemma* suggests that moderation about principles isn't consistent with moderation about demands; it suggests that commitment to moderate (commonsense) moral principles *leads* to the severe diachronic demandingness that commonsense rejects. If we recognize the genuine import of our basic

moral principles, we'll be forced to choose between severe demandingness or nihilism.[12] The dilemma says we can accept morality's demandingness *or* reject morality; but we can't deny morality's demandingness without becoming, in effect, moral nihilists. This doesn't mean we'd have to become brutes or remain silent about other people's conduct or social affairs. Nihilists need not be cruel or malicious. They may even resemble moral realists in much of their ordinary behavior. Nietzsche, in fact, seemed to think that most of us already are moral nihilists, whether we know it or not, though we obviously don't take ourselves ordinarily to be nihilists. What we're *missing*, he thought, are the full implications of this implicit nihilism. That is, in some sense, we have already settled the dilemma, and we've settled it *against* morality, we just haven't yet grasped what that really means. That, I hope, will become clearer once we've gone through the Nietzschean dialectic ourselves in Chapter 4.

2. The Sources of Moral Demandingness

Let's take stock. I have claimed that the notion of moral demandingness we are interested in investigating is demandingness in the "normative sense," DNS, which concerns the conflictual or harmonious relation between the Right and the Good as they figure into the lives of agents. I then distinguished between *Synchronic* and *Diachronic Demandingness*, or demandingness-at-a-time as opposed to demandingness-over-time; and I claimed that our primary interest is in Diachronic Demandingness. Finally, I distinguished *philosophical demandingness* from *commonsense demandingness*. The latter turns on whether morality's demands fit (or don't) with our

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[12] None of this, note, means that morality is not also demanding in the philosophical sense. Kagan could for all we know be correct. I am only saying that the ultimate dilemma doesn't turn on that.

commonsensical intuitions about these demands, i.e., whether morality requires deep, systematic, substantive changes in how we're currently living. This, in turn, helps clarify the *ultimate dilemma*. The question that frames the *ultimate dilemma* is whether morality is diachronically demanding in the commonsense understanding, whether there's some sort of deep conflict between the Right and the Good.

This question is difficult to raise about morality *as such*. This is partly because there's serious disagreement about morality itself, e.g., about the nature of the Right and the Good and the relationship between them. It is easier to raise the question about specific moral *theories*. If it turns out that all our best moral theories force the conclusion that morality is diachronically demanding in the commonsense construal, then, I think, that provides us with some modicum of evidence that morality as such is demanding too. Although I investigate the demandingness of (some of) the main contenders for our best moral theories below, I won't argue this controversial point.

But how should we examine the theories themselves? For this, we must say more about the *sources* of demandingness. That is our next step; and Samuel Scheffler will help us take it. In *Human Morality*, Scheffler (1992) provides a list of features that can generate the sorts of conflicts (or harmonies) that DNS tracks. For Scheffler, the demandingness of a moral theory is about the "congruence" it (dis)allows between the agent's self-interest and morality's non-self-interested demands. Demandingness, in this sense, is a gradable property. Highly demanding moral theories will insist that there is either a necessary incongruence between morality's demands and the individual's self-interest or that such congruence is, while possible, unlikely given the circumstances of the world. As a quick caveat, I think that Scheffler's construal of demandingness as a conflict between morality and self-interest is somewhat

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misleading. Demandingness can arise not as a conflict between self-centered and non-self-centered considerations, but as one between different *types of goods*, e.g., interpersonal or aesthetic goods versus moral ones; and it can even arise between competing moral considerations. To forego doing a great good for one's friend in order to prevent a great evil to a stranger might be "demanding," but we wouldn't, I think, claim that doing a great good to a friend is essentially and necessarily "self-interested" behavior. It can, however, be reasonably described as inhabiting the ambit of one's Good. (Cf. Williams "Persons, Character, and Morality" 1981, 13). For this reason, I'll continue talking in terms of the Right and the Good rather than self-interest.

According to Scheffler, the demandingness (DNS) of a moral theory is a function of how it fills out the details concerning the following features:

- **<u>Content</u>**: How *stringent* are moral requirements? are agents ever morally obligated to sacrifice themselves—their time, their property, or even their lives—for the sake of other humans or even non-humans? how costly would it be to perform the actions that morality requires?

- **<u>Authority</u>**: Are moral considerations always *overriding* or can they be overridden by non-moral considerations? E.g., if I determine that I, all-things-considered, morally ought to do some action, A, can any non-moral consideration serve as a sufficient justificatory reason not to do A?

- **<u>Scope</u>**: How *pervasive* are moral considerations and demands? can every action or deliberative context be the appropriate subject of moral assessment, or are there some domains that are insulated from morality?

- **Deliberative Role**: How should morality enter into and affect *deliberation*? should we always be fully cognizant of what's the morally right or wrong action in every situation, or only sometimes cognizant in selective situations? what kind of procedure (if any) should we employ in deliberating about moral matters?

Scheffler implication seems to be that the most demanding moral theory will (a) construe the content of morality's demands as stringent; (b) construe morality's demands as overriding; (c) construe moral considerations as pervasive—they're relevant and operative in (possibly) every context—and it will (d) require the agent to engage in cognitively or emotionally costly deliberative practices, e.g., frequently weighting, as far as possible, probable consequences of one's actions or constantly monitoring and checking the 'moral purity' of one's reasons and maxims.

This kind of moral theory is unlikely to leave an agent much, if any, room for pursuing her own "ground projects" and goals. These projects and goals can never in themselves—that is, in virtue of being *my* projects and goals—serve as self-standing, overriding reasons against moral obligations. Agents who abide by such a moral theory will be plagued by the constant and nagging deliberative demand to devote their finite attention to spotting potential moral considerations, improving and revising their mental and behavioral habits in light of these considerations, and incorporating these kinds of considerations into their complicated, frequent, and perhaps anxiety-tinged deliberations, etc.

Scheffler's list includes only those features that are internal to moral theories. But it is absolutely crucial to recognize that the demandingness of a moral theory isn't merely a function of features that are internal to it. It also importantly depends upon the *state or condition*

of the world the agent finds herself in.[13] Hume offers an instructive example. He claims that the social

virtue of justice would be silent (or absent) in a world of abundance. In the abundant world,

no one could suffer from having "less" of some valued good than anyone else. There is enough

to satisfy everyone's real and potential desires and needs. Whereas, in a world of moderate

scarcity, justice will often demand curbing and controlling one's desire for the neighbor's

goods. I propose, then, to add a fifth feature to Scheffler's list:

- **Context**: Does the agent's context—the circumstances, environment, or world in which he acts—instantiate the conditions that generate extreme demands, if placed in conjunction with a moral theory's construal of the content, authority, scope, and deliberative role of morality?

The fifth feature, Context, seems especially relevant for the distinction between philosophical

and commonsensical demandingness. The debate over philosophical demandingness typically

presupposes some set of facts about the world, i.e., it holds an implicit construal of Context,

but these aren't always thematized or clarified. This, I think, is because the debate is often

conducted at a second-order level; philosophers want to examine whether a moral theory is

demanding (or not) in virtue of its formal features. Thus, they tend to assume a Context that's

relatively wide and indeterminate, e.g., conditions of 'moderate scarcity,' etc. Commonsense

also has an implicit construal of Context, but its construal is often too narrow rather than too

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[13] I include here the conditions of the agent herself, e.g., her cognitive capacities, as conditions "external" to the moral theory. Note, Scheffler doesn't deny the claim about external conditions. He recognizes this and attempts to address it (1992, Chapter 6).

wide: it operates piecemeal by examining a specific interpersonal interaction, or a particular social issue (e.g., racial justice *or* Covid-19 *or* climate change) without thinking about them in relation to *one another* or together as a whole. The demandingness that can arise from commonsense morality often seems to emerge from first-order considerations of Context, while philosophical demandingness often seems to arrive at its conclusions when it construes Context in highly general terms. In any case, the point I am making is that we should avoid assuming that, if Moral Theory *A* is more demanding than Moral Theory *B*, then *A* is more demanding than *B* in every possible world. Although moral theories that are *absolutely* demanding are indeed possible, I would suggest that all the plausible moral theories are only demanding in a *relative* sense. The worry I have is that we are prone to erroneously jump from the recognition that morality is demanding in *this* world to the conclusion that it is demanding *as such* if we are not sufficiently sensitive to Context.

These features—call them *Scheffler's Features*—provide a schema for determining the degree of demandingness a moral theory will generate. It doesn't, however, provide guidance in determining what should be done once we have made such a determination. That is, how should one respond if it turns out a moral theory is extreme or moderate in its demands? Say we have determined that Moral Theory *A* is extreme. Is that sufficient ground for rejecting *A* out of hand? Is it perhaps merely a single strike against *A*? Should *A* be revised with the aim of achieving reflective equilibrium?[14] Or is demandingness perhaps an irrelevant consideration in deliberations about whether a moral theory should be accepted, rejected, or revised? These

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[14] For the "reflective equilibrium" (RE) route, see Brian Berkey (2016). Berkey argues that RE doesn't ultimately forestall the conclusion that "moderate" moral principles, considered in light of present circumstances, won't issue extreme demands.

are difficult questions to answer.

But we can outline the kinds of answers that the literature offers. As I see it, there are four of these: (a) *Acceptance*, (b) *Rejection*, (c) *Denial*, and (c) *Revision*. The extreme demandingness of morality can be accepted. Acceptance need not imply that we *can* live up to the extreme demands of morality or that we should blamed for failures to do so. Creatures like us are naturally and inevitably self-focused (though *not* necessarily in a selfish manner). Acceptance is not as common as *Rejection*, though. This involves the rejection of a moral theory *because* of its extreme demandingness.[15] The extreme demandingness of act-utilitarianism is typically offered as a reason to reject it in favor of another theory—rule-utilitarianism or Kantianism perhaps—or in favor of an 'anti-theoretical' approach to morality or not in favor of anything at all. *Denial* is also more frequent than *Acceptance*. This involves the denial that a particular moral theory is extremely demanding. John Stuart Mill, for instance, thought that the common Good was best served or maximized through the promotion of individuality or the personal Good (see *On Liberty*, chapter 3). If true, this implies that utilitarianism isn't extremely diachronically demanding in the commonsense meaning. Mill's strategy is a reconciliatory form of *Denial*: doing what's right involves promoting one's own good. More commonly still, consequentialists will engage in *Revision*. For instance, Alastair Norcross (2006) argues that, to overcome the extreme demandingness of their theory, consequentialism should purge itself of demands altogether and adopt a "scalar" form of consequentialism instead. Scheffler (1982) offers a revision of consequentialism to include what he calls "agent-centered prerogatives," which allow agents to place a greater weight on their own Good than on the interests of others.

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[15] The idea that a theory or principle can be rejected purely because of its demandingness has been challenged by Sobel (2007) and others. For a response, see especially McElwee (2017) and Woollard (2016).

There is more to add, of course. I will try to make some important additions by turning next to examine specific moral theories and their take on moral demandingness. Specifically, as I noted before, I will examine Kantianism, utilitarianism, and Schopenhauer's ethics to see whether they commit their adherents to a morally demanding, self-sacrificial existence. As I also noted, I think these theories are the most relevant for grasping Nietzsche's contribution to the debate over moral demandingness. Nietzsche's critiques of Kant, Schopenhauer, and the utilitarians are very well known. But, if Nietzsche critiqued these philosophers *for* the demandingness of their moral theories, it is worth addressing whether there is a good and compelling reason (in general) to do so. I think there is. That is what I attempt to demonstrate in the next section. I cannot hope to demonstrate this conclusively, though. I will consider it sufficient If I can merely show that demandingness is a serious issue for these moral theories that would have warranted Nietzsche's engagement.

3. Moral Theories and Demandingness

3.1. Utilitarian Demandingness

Utilitarianism—and its consequentialist offshoots—has been at the center of the demandingness debate. Here I will focus specifically on Henry Sidgwick's version of utilitarianism in *The Methods of Ethics* (ME). Sidgwick is often considered to be the last of the classical utilitarians. I will provide a brief account of his views and I'll examine his moral theory through Scheffler's Features. I'll argue that it is indeed demanding. I'll then discuss some

standard responses to this conclusion. And, I'll suggest, there are good reasons to suspect that these standard consequentialist attempts to avoid this conclusion, including Sidgwick's own, aren't compelling.

As Sidgwick defined it, utilitarianism is the view that, "The conduct which, under any given circumstances, is objectively right, is that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness on the whole" (ME 4.1.1). This definition is meant to capture the views of Bentham and Mill, and, as Crisp (2014) argues, there's good reason to think that it does. It should, then, be seen as "*the* canonical statement of classical utilitarianism" (Crisp, 234). Sidgwick argued that utilitarianism is based in what he called "the axiom of Rational Benevolence" (RB). RB states that, "Each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own, except in so far as he judges it to be less, when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable by him" (ME 3.13.5). RB isn't strictly speaking an axiom, though. Sidgwick 'infers' RB from two self-evident, rational 'intuitions': (a) from the "point of view of the universe," my own good is no more important than the good of anyone else;[16] and (b) that, as a rational being, "I am bound to aim at good generally," i.e., not just at my *own* good (ibid). Utilitarianism construes the notion of "good" hedonistically (as happiness), and thus, it claims I am ought to act in those ways that maximize the amount of overall happiness in the universe, impartially considered (Crisp 2014). That's the basic and familiar view.

If we tried to adhere to utilitarianism, it is simple to see how we could quickly arrive at severe diachronic demandingness. Let's consider how this happens via Scheffler's Features.

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[16] Sidgwick adds a caveat here: "unless, that is, there are special grounds for believing that more good is likely to be realised in the one case than in the other" (ME 3.13.5).

First, the content is stringent. Utilitarianism requires agents to prevent great harms, but also to actively promote people's happiness in general. That already seems demanding enough on any credible conception of happiness or welfare. It threatens to become infinitely more demanding if we extend moral consideration to non-human animals too, as utilitarians since Bentham standardly do. (The relevant question, Bentham said, isn't whether animals can "reason," but whether they can *suffer*.) Second, the scope of the theory is pervasive. There is no sphere of life that is not subject to it. It is difficult to imagine that there isn't *always* some alternative course of action that's open to me and that would produce more good (impartially considered) than whatever I am doing or planning on doing right now. If so, I am acting wrongly all the time. Third, utilitarianism is overriding in Scheffler's sense. Scheffler construes overridingness in terms of rationality. Utilitarianism, Sidgwick says, is a "method" of ethics. But what is that? He explains: a method of ethics is "any rational procedure by which we determine what individual human beings 'ought' or what it is 'right' for them to do, or to seek to realize by voluntary actions" (ME 1.1.1). For Sidgwick, "what I ought to do?" is equivalent to "what do I have most reason to do?" (Cf. Singer and de Lazari-Radek 2014, Chapter 2). Thus, utilitarianism is the view that agents have an all-things-considered or ultimate reason to do that which will maximize overall good in the universe. This, though, is just to say that the theory incorporates overriding reasons to act as morality commands. To act otherwise is to act irrationally. Fourth, Sidgwick famously argues for an 'esoteric morality' (ME 4.5.3) insofar as he thinks it wouldn't be conducive to general happiness if the ordinary majority tried to deliberately live in accordance with the utilitarian method. So, it seems he didn't think utilitarianism imposes extreme demands on practical deliberation itself. But, assuming we are not pro-esotericism, it isn't implausible to assume that utilitarianism could impose severe

demands on deliberation itself.[17] In any case, if consider utilitarianism's demands in the context of our own times, we will have to conclude that it is severely diachronically demanding. As Kagan writes, "Given the parameters of the actual world, there is no question that promoting the good would require a life of hardship, self-denial, and austerity" (1989, 360). This doesn't mean that failure to live up to utilitarianism's demands should always court blame. For utilitarians, blame and praise are themselves subject to the principle of utility—if blaming (praising) someone for failure won't be conducive to the general good, then we ought not to blame (praise) them (ME 4.3.2). That, however, is separable from whether they've acted wrongly or not.[18]

Did Sidgwick recognize the threat of demandingness? There's some indication that he did. He notes that utilitarianism is sometimes charged with making "exaggerated demands on human nature" (ME 1.6.3). (This is a critique that's addressed by Mill in the second chapter of his *Utilitarianism*, as Sidgwick knows). In any case, he obviously recognized the tension between the impartiality of the utilitarian system and the partiality of ordinary human life and commonsense morality. The latter places great emphasis on interpersonal relationships, on love and affection, family, friendship, etc. These relationships ground a set of special obligations, e.g., the obligations of parents towards their children. These kinds of obligations

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[17] This strikes me as a source of demandingness that Railton's "sophisticated consequentialism" seeks to avoid. The Sophisticated Consequentialist "has a standing commitment to leading an objectively consequentialist life, but who need not set special stock in any particular form of decision making and therefore does not necessarily seek to lead a subjectively consequentialist life" (1984, 174). Is it strange to think that being a sophisticated consequentialist involves rejecting subjective consequentialism? Railton says, "It is well known that in certain emergencies, the best outcome requires action so swift as to preclude consequentialist deliberation" (175). The sophisticated consequentialist has reason to "inculcate in himself certain dispositions to act rapidly in obvious emergencies" (ibid).

[18] See especially Parfit (1984) for the notion of "blameless wrongdoing."

are moreover taken to be paradigms of morality in commonsense thought. Utilitarianism seems to threaten us with an upheaval of our commonsense moral-conceptual scheme and with the hijacking of our lives in its pursuit of maximizing the good. Does Sidgwick accept this?

He does not. Sidgwick offers several arguments that aim at constraining the threat of severe diachronic demandingness. In practice, he claims, utilitarianism isn't much more demanding than commonsense morality. First, he argues that, because each person knows herself and her needs and desires better than those of others, each one of us is more likely to succeed in securing our own happiness than that of others. But second, we are more likely to benefit or promote the happiness of others when we ourselves are happy. Therefore, it seems that we maximize the general good whenever we prioritize our own good (ME 4.3.3). Thirdly, we are also much more likely to improve the lives of those who are closer to us and with whom we have a bond and are thus more inclined to benefit anyway, like family, friends, neighbors, etc.[19] The strangers in far-off lands are unfamiliar to us—and since we don't know their culture, values, norms, desires, etc., we're not in a good position to determine what (if any) kinds of benefits we could provide them at all. It seems that we do best when we concentrate on the promotion of our own happiness and that of the "small number of persons" that surround us (ibid).

These arguments were perhaps more convincing in 19th Century England, but they are not at all convincing in a modern Context, as Singer and de Lazari-Radek note (2014, 325). It is not terribly difficult to recognize that many people are in desperate need of basic necessities,

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[19] See Frank Jackson, "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism" (1991) for a similar view.

like water, shelter, medicine, etc., and that it is entirely possible to help them. Even if we're entitled to give some priority to our own happiness as well as to that of friends and family for the reasons Sidgwick gave, it seems utilitarianism would still require Affluent folks to sacrifice many of the comforts they enjoy. Also, Sidgwick did recognize we have obligations towards strangers in some cases. He writes, for instance, that, "[i]f I am made aware that, owing to a sudden calamity that could not have been foreseen, another's resources are manifestly inadequate to protect him from pain or serious discomfort … my theoretical obligation to consider his happiness as much as my own becomes at once practical; and I am bound to make as much effort to relieve him as will not entail a greater loss of happiness to myself or others" (ME 4.3.3).[20] Are the 700 million people who live on less than $1.90 a day all responsible for the calamities that befall them?[21] That would be absurd. It seems, then, that, if we have excess funds, it's reasonable for a utilitarian to conclude we morally ought to spend it on alleviating the plight of the global poor. This, note, doesn't even begin to broach the question of the responsibility that affluent nations bear on *creating* and *sustaining* these plights. If, as Sidgwick says, we have an obligation to help those who suffer great losses from unexpected calamities, wouldn't our obligation be that much greater if we are (as individuals or collectives) responsible for the calamity itself?

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[20] Sidgwick didn't think "the rich" have an obligation to alleviate the suffering of the poor, though, because that would be "encouraging improvidence" (ME 4.3.3). In other words, he seemed to think that the poor are typically poor because of some personal failing and that we'll encourage them to do better by forcing them, and their children and families, to struggle to survive! (Cf. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, for a fascinating historical account of these sorts of arguments). Singer and de Lazari-Radek suggest that Sidgwick probably also thought that these kinds of issues were better addressed politically rather than interpersonally (2014, 325). Sidgwick, unlike Bentham, was primarily interested in ethics as a guide to *individual* conduct rather than for institutions.

[21] The number, $1.90, is set by the World Bank and is considered by some economists to be too low and to reflect the interests of affluent nations and their corporate sponsors rather than the interests of the global poor. See, for instance, Philip Alston, "The parlous state of poverty eradication: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights" (2020).

The diachronic demandingness of utilitarianism is a serious possibility, then. For many philosophers, including those sympathetic to utilitarianism and consequentialism, this counts as a decisive objection to utilitarianism. But how is the strategy of *Rejection* justified? The most common reason is the appeal to the costs that the theory or principle imposes on agents. As I mentioned earlier, this has led some consequentialists to engage in *Revision* of various sorts. Brad Hooker (2000) offers a "Rule Consequentialism" that limits the demands of morality; Scheffler (1982) proposes "agent-centered prerogatives;" Alastair Norcross (2006) argues for a "scalar" utilitarianism that only measures the degree of goodness that holds between states of affairs but issues no demands.[22] Yet, it's unclear whether these attempts are well motivated. The costs that these Revisionists appeal to are most commonly centered on agents' well-being. But, as David Sobel (2007) argues, the appeal to costs can't be sufficient to undermine consequentialism. It is *assumed*, Sobel claims, that the costs to the agent who's required to come to another's aid (say) are more "morally significant" than the costs that would be imposed on the would-be recipient of the aid. This assumption signifies a "decisive break" from consequentialism that precedes any objection that might be based on demandingness itself (2007, 3). If the affluent person who is being required to contribute 20% of her income to ensure that others don't die from the mere lack of clean drinking water can complain that this is 'too demanding,' why can't those at risk of dying raise essentially the same complaint?

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[22] Paul Hurley (2006) has a similar strategy. Consequentialism, he says, should be understood principally as a theory about moral standards rather than a theory of practical reason. It says that agents are morally required to do whatever brings about the best consequences, but it doesn't tie this to reasons for action. But, in response, we've seen that Sidgwick does think of rightness in terms of reasons. And, even if Hurley and Norcross were to only propose this as a *Revision*, it seems like a sleight of hand. The question of whether the *standards* of a moral theory are demanding is still intelligible and important, independently of its account of practical reason. If we take morality seriously, we'd want to know what a certain standard of conduct spells out about how we ought to live.

Indeed, it seems that, if a moral theory will allow them to die just so another may live a bit more comfortably, *they* have a much more decisive argument against that theory's demandingness. The highest costs will befall them, not on those providing aid.

The same problem seems to plague Liam Murphy's (2000) objection to demandingness. He argues that we're only morally required to do our "fair share" in addressing global poverty. If, say, $10 from each affluent person would be sufficient to eliminate the plight of the global poor, then my fair share, as an affluent person, would be to give $10 towards that end. Why, though, should anyone think it would be 'fair' to let the global poor suffer the consequences of other people's failure to do their share? Murphy is already presupposing that the costs of morality's requirements are more morally significant than the costs of what it allows others to suffer. In addition, Murphy's view is also counterintuitive insofar as it suggests that one is not obligated to prevent great evil simply because another hasn't done their fair share in preventing it. As Singer and de Lazari-Radek put it, "imagine that there are ten people standing by a shallow pond in which ten children are drowning. I do my share and save one but as I emerge from the pond I see that the other nine adults, instead of jumping into the cold water and saving a child, are walking away. Is it really all right for me to walk on, saying that I have done my share and so have no obligation to save another child?" (2014, 329-30). Obviously not.[23]

Severe diachronic demandingness therefore certainly seems to be a substantive issue for consequentialism, as many philosophers have typically assumed. For some ethicists, this

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[23] The "integrity" objection Williams offers could be subjected to the same critique, *if* we understand it as a substantive good. This is Ashford's view (2000). Others have argued this is a mistaken interpretation of Williams. Thomas (2015) claims the integrity objection should be couched in Williams' internalism about reasons. Perhaps this is a correct interpretation of Williams, but I think it wouldn't be sufficient to curb morality's demandingness (see Chappell 2007).

motivates *Rejection* of utilitarianism (or consequentialism) itself. The question, though, is whether any of the alternatives fare better than utilitarianism does on this score? I'll explore the demandingness of Kantianism next to see whether it can avoid similar degrees of diachronic demandingness.

3.2. Kantian Demandingness

It is commonly thought that the demandingness of utilitarianism is a function of its commitment to maximization. The demand to maximize happiness or the impartially considered Good generates the threat of severe demandingness. Kantian ethics rejects maximization. There's no moral obligation to maximize the amount of happiness in the universe. This, though, doesn't mean Kantian ethics avoids severe diachronic demandingness, as there may be alternate avenues by which the problem appears. Indeed, I will argue that that there's reason to think that Kantian ethics would be severely demanding if we consider the implications of the imperfect duty of beneficence in the present global Context. I will start with an exposition of the basic argument for Kantian demandingness. I will then raise and criticize the standard Kantian attempts to avoid the conclusion of severe diachronic demandingness.

Following Scheffler's Features, it's clear that Kantian ethics construes the authority of morality as strongly overriding. Kant says, "where the moral law speaks, there is, objectively, no further room for free choice with regard to what that is to be done" (CJ 5:210). Morality issues its verdicts unconditionally, categorically. Kant's claim in *Groundwork I* that we can conceive of nothing that's unqualifiedly good other than a "good will" has been interpreted by

Thomas Hill as a claim about the overridingness of moral demands (2002, Chapter 2). As Hill explains, the notion of unconditional goodness is "what is it reasonable to choose to pursue, preserve, and cherish without regard to special considerations" (50). It is an abiding commitment to act as practical reason commands. According to Timmerman, the authority of morality is, for Kant, so absolute and complete that it "*silences* or *eclipses* any other claim to value" (2005, 240). "Moral goodness does not just trump any other kind of practical value but completely annihilates it" (Timmerman 2005, 242). Therefore, Kant writes, any "ends that may present themselves to me," which arise from any domain *other* than that of morality, "are not taken into consideration at all" within practical deliberation, once morality determines what I ought to do (8:283). The hegemony that morality wields over the domain of practical reason also implies something about its scope: there are no aspects of human life that are 'morality-free,' so to speak. No actions are in principle immune to moral assessment. Thus, Kant would have to disagree with Williams' famous claim that "some situations lie beyond justifications" (1981, 18; cf. Wolf 1982).[24] In principle, all actions can be subjected to justification for its

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[24] This is connected to Williams' integrity objection. Williams attacks both Kantianism and utilitarianism for undermining the possibility of agential integrity. He thinks that, if a conflict arises between "impartial morality" and one's "ground projects," which constitutes one's character, then, according to Kantianism, morality

> must be required to win; and that cannot necessarily be a reasonable demand on the agent. There can come a point at which it is quite unreasonable for a man to give up, in the name of the impartial good ordering of the world of moral agents, something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in that world at all. Once one thinks about what is involved in having a character, one can see that the Kantian's omission of character is a condition of their ultimate insistence on the demands of impartial morality (1981, 14).

Williams in fact offers several different arguments in his work that are meant to demonstrate how Kantian ethics undermines integrity: (1) morality requires us to care about the wrong kind of thing, e.g., about duty rather than persons themselves (1981); (2) it marginalizes our emotions ("Morality and the Emotions," 1973); and (3) it seeks to dominate our lives, forcing us to become more attached to it than to other values, relations, etc (1985). I focus here on the third argument. The first line of argument perhaps receives its most famous articulation in Michael Stocker (1976). Barbara Herman identifies all three of these arguments, and offers rebuttals to them, in her "Integrity and Impartiality" (*The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 1996). See also Scheffler 1992, Chapter 2, for a compelling rebuttal to Williams' idea of a practical domain that lies "beyond" justification.

adherence, or failure of adherence, to the moral law.

Authority and scope aren't sufficient for severe diachronic demandingness, though. If the demands of morality aren't *stringent*, i.e., if their content doesn't diverge to a great extent from one's desires, inclinations, non-moral projects, etc., then even the absolute authority and pervasive scope of morality wouldn't necessarily translate into a self-sacrificial life. Kant, of course, thinks that morality issues its demands "without promising anything to the inclinations" (GMM 4:405). But it is still possible for the demands of morality to be *contingently* congruent with inclination and, therefore, with my own happiness (CPR 5:128). Kant affirms this congruence in his idea of the "highest good," which is happiness coupled with the *worthiness* of being happy (CPR 5:130). Although, Kant claims, one's worthiness to be happy depends entirely on one's commitment to morality (ibid). The harmonization between morality and happiness is something that can be *guaranteed* only in the "*kingdom of God,*" however (CPR 5:129-30). What hope do we have for such congruence while we're still stuck in God's terrestrial kingdom? To probe this question, we'll need to say more about the Kantian system of duties.

There are two crucial distinctions that constitute the core of Kantian ethics: (1) *perfect* and *imperfect duties*; and (2) *duties to self* and *duties to others*. Perfect duties are duties that must be strictly followed.[25] It is never permissible to violate them. The paradigmatic example is lying.

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[25] van Ackeren and Sticker (2015) argue that perfect duties can be demanding, on Kant's view. It can require sacrificing one's life rather than uttering a lie. But this seems more like Synchronic Demandingness rather than Diachronic Demandingness, which is what I'm interested in here. Sticker and van Ackeren write that, "The specific form of Kantian demandingness … comes in the form of the threat that an agent at any time might find herself in a situation in which she has to sacrifice all of her non-moral goods" (85). This might generate (unreasonable) diachronic anxiety, but it seems entirely insufficient for generating severe diachronic demandingness unless we assume that such situations where one must sacrifice one's life are ordinary rather than extraordinary.

It's never permissible to lie. (Perhaps it's *excusable* in some cases, but it is never not morally wrong.) Imperfect duties must also be obeyed—they are not any less *obligatory* than perfect duties are—but, unlike perfect duties, they admit of what Kant calls "latitude." Moral agents have freedom ('playroom,' *Spielraum*) in deciding when and how such duties are to be discharged. Beneficence is a paradigmatic imperfect duty: the happiness of other persons is an obligatory end that must be incorporated into the maxims of rational beings (MM 6:393). "To be beneficent," Kant writes, "that is, to promote according to one's means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return, is everyone's duty" (MM 6:453). "I ought," Kant says, "to sacrifice a part of my welfare to others without hope of return, because this is a duty," *but* he continues, "it is impossible to assign a determinate limit to the extent of this sacrifice" (MM 6:393). Beneficence is an obligatory end, yet Kant is not claiming we're required to try our best to promote everyone's happiness all the time.

How should this "latitude" be understood, though? Thomas Hill has suggested that the latitude of imperfect duties should be understood as "the freedom to choose to do x or not on a given occasion, as one pleases … provided that one is ready to perform acts of that sort on some other occasion" (1992, 155). The duty is to act in a way that is consistent with the obligatory end, yet it is up to each agent to determine the best way for themselves to fulfill this imperfect duty and further that obligatory end; they determine what they'd like to do, when they'd like to do it, etc. So, for instance, I do not fail to fulfill the duty of beneficence if I pass by an unhoused individual, begging for money on the street, without giving her my spare change, provided that I will and do in fact give assistance to other needy persons on other occasions (and do so because it's a duty). By contrast, I violate my perfect duty to refrain from lying if I lie *just once*, and even if 99 out of 100 occasions I am truthful and honest. For

the Kantian, I am not permitted to ever engage in deception, but I am permitted to be less than maximally beneficent.

This sounds as if the discretion we have in applying the imperfect duty of beneficence is quite generous. In that case, the *stringency* of beneficence should be sufficiently mitigated so that it prevents severe diachronic demandingness. Nevertheless, I think there are grounds to question how generous the applicability scope really is for the Kantian. For there seem to be *prima facie* cases where the latitude of beneficence ebbs or disappears entirely. Alice Pinhero-Walla (2015) argues that "latitude shrinks away when refusing to help would amount to *giving up* one's commitment to beneficence *altogether*" (734). She explains,

> While bypassing opportunities to help is mostly compatible with a maxim of beneficence … there are circumstances when acting otherwise would necessarily imply that the agent has altogether given up a maxim of beneficence. Making use of the latitude of wide duties is permissible in Kant's account as long as one remains sincerely committed to the moral end. Certain circumstances, however, put the sincerity of one's commitment to the moral end *under proof*. Under these circumstances the duty to help acquires a *stringency* that is identical to that of perfect duties. This is because even though beneficence is an imperfect duty, the requirement to adopt a moral end is itself. Strict one … As rational finite beings we are strictly required to adopt the happiness of others as our end, but since this involves the furtherance of an end … we need latitude for choice, so that we can comply with other duties and have the necessary space for the satisfaction of permissible needs and non-moral interests (734).[26]

This is intuitively plausible. If I know I can save a child that is about to walk into traffic on a busy highway, without risking myself, but I instead rationalize my inaction by telling myself, "Well, I'll just do something good tomorrow; maybe I'll donate to the local foodbank or something," then my commitment to beneficence surely seems disingenuous or otherwise

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[26] Cf. Marcia Baron: "there are instances where a failure to help would indicate that the agent has not really embraced the end of others' happiness" (1997, 17).

deeply confused. Latitude is itself restricted, then. It requires at least, as van Ackeren and Sticker (2018) suggest, the careful exercise of "judgment" in determining its application (GMM 4:389).[27]

Imperfect duties don't come equipped with a detailed manual for application. They don't even specify the range of actions one might take. That is why judgment is needed. In the *Anthropology*, Kant claims that one of the crucial practical roles of the power of judgment is in determining "what is at stake" in a given situation (AN 7:227). Judgment assists in discerning the morally relevant features that could help us in applying our duties. What might be the relevant criteria for the application of the duty of beneficence? Certainly, one of the most relevant criterions is that which is supplied by the concept of "emergency" [*Noth*]. For Kant, emergencies are a matter of "*existential need*" (van Ackeren and Sticker 2018, 413). Emergencies are when people's most basic and fundamental interests—food, clothing, shelter, bodily integrity, etc.—are under serious threat. The gravity of these kinds of threats also means that emergencies call for "*immediate action*" from those who can offer aid (van Ackeren and Sticker, 414). It is important to note that none of this implies Kant considered emergencies to be rare, exceptional, sudden, or only episodic (ibid). In fact, some of Kant's claims suggest otherwise. He mentions, for instance, the "emergencies arising from the constant wars" (8:310).[28]

If cases of emergency are especially crucial for the duty of beneficence, then perhaps

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[27] For instance, Kant claims we should try to ensure that we're not humiliating others, or making them overly dependent on us, when we're being beneficent towards (6:448).

[28] In Kant's argument for the duty of beneficence in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he doesn't emphasize (as in the *Groundwork*) the *occasional* need for other people's help, but rather he appeals to cases of "emergency" (MM 6:453). We couldn't rationally will a maxim that permitted people to always decline assisting others in emergencies as a universal law. It is our susceptibility to emergencies that makes beneficence an obligatory end and thus an imperfect duty.

our response to emergencies can serve as a litmus test for our genuine commitment to the obligatory end of furthering others' happiness? This seems right. The failure to provide aid in an emergency is precisely the kind of thing that would lead someone to question another's moral commitments and priorities.[29] But, if so, there's a very simple step to severe diachronic demandingness from here. Who could possibly deny the innumerable emergency cases that constitute global poverty and its endless parade of miseries today?[30] It seems that, failure to address these global emergencies—of which we're all aware—suggests we are not really committed to beneficence; we're more committed to prioritizing our own happiness and comfort instead.

There are several arguments Kantians could use to halt this disturbing conclusion. Let's examine them. First, according to Kant, there are constraints on beneficence that are already built into morality. We're only required to promote the permissible ends of other persons; we are not required to promote those ends that we believe won't further their happiness or that we (reasonably) believe aren't worthwhile,[31] unless we are contractually obligated to do so (MM 6:388); and we shouldn't violate any perfect duties in our efforts to

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[29] I don't mean that this is always the case, or that the Kantian would never think it appropriate to excuse people who fail to act in emergency situations under certain conditions (see Pinhero-Walla 2015 for additional discussion).

[30] Onora O'Neill, who has also argued that Kant's formula of humanity requires us to actively promote and safeguard other people's autonomy insofar as they're "ends in themselves," and because "hunger, great poverty, and powerlessness all undercut the possibility of autonomous action … Kantians are required to do what they can to avert, reduce, and remedy hunger" (2013, 513).

[31] T. M. Scanlon's famous example in "Preference and Urgency" (1975) seems apropos here: "The fact that someone would be willing to forgo a decent diet in order to build a monument to his god does not mean that his claim on others for aid in his project has the same strength as a claim for aid in obtaining enough to eat" (659-60).

discharge imperfect ones.[32] Kant also thinks the happiness of agents is worthwhile only on the condition of their moral *worthiness* to be happy, as I noted above (GMM 4:393). These conditions don't mitigate the demandingness of beneficence in the global Context, though. What else might a Kantian say?

Kant claims that there's an "indirect" duty to "secure" one's own happiness (GMM 4:399).[33] If by devoting much more of my time, energy, and income to the alleviation of global poverty, I would be condemning myself to a life of unhappiness, I am not required to do so. But I think this is to misunderstand Kant's claim. The indirect duty isn't to protect or ensure my happiness qua joy; rather, it is to *avoid* "lack of contentment" (ibid). I have an indirect duty to prevent myself from falling below a certain *threshold* of unhappiness. My beneficence, Kant claims, shouldn't extend to the point where I would "come to need the beneficence of others" myself (MM 6:454). Affluent folk are well above *that* threshold. Secondly, it's an indirect duty because, Kant says, lack of contentment would make it more likely for one to succumb to temptation (ibid). This is also why seeking "prosperity" is an indirect duty; poverty is a "a great temptation to vice" (MM 6:388). This, however, means our happiness cannot itself constrain our duties. We are only permitted to pursue our happiness *if* we adopt everyone's happiness as our end, i.e., insofar as we are committed to beneficence. (See Pinhero-Walla 2015, 739). The indirect strategy therefore seems unpromising as a mitigator of moral demandingness.

Another possibility is to employ the second distinction (mentioned previously) that belongs to the heart of Kantian ethics, viz., the distinction between duties to self and duties

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[32] Kant says it can be humiliating to beg, so we protect the other's self-respect when helping. Nietzsche makes a similar claim: "Great indebtedness does not make men grateful, but vengeful; and if a little charity is not forgotten, it turns into a gnawing worm" (Z II: 3).

[33] See Nancy Sherman (1997).

to others. Kant claims that one of our obligatory ends is the development of our own talents (GMM 4:423). This is also an imperfect duty; so, there's latitude in how we pursue this end too. But it is no less a duty than beneficence is a duty. Thus, morality must leave room for self-directed activities, and that means beneficence cannot completely 'annihilate' our personal projects insofar as cultivating our own non-moral talents is a constitutive part of such projects. We therefore have *two* obligatory ends, on the Kantian view: promoting others' happiness and perfecting ourselves. Kant doesn't rank either end above the other. According to Marcia Baron, this protects Kantian ethics from a charge of over-demandingness. "Moral excellence comes in considerable variety," Baron says (1997, 19). I can be "morally excellent" *without* being so single-minded about promoting the happiness or basic welfare of others. Katja Vogt (2008) has argued for a similar view.[34] As she understands it, the cultivation of "one's talents … is not something that we value so highly that morality should make room for it; rather, agents have a *duty* to develop their talents. A life which does not make room for learning something, or for pursuing one's talents is not a life of praiseworthy sacrifice, but rather a life in which things of moral significance are being neglected" (2008, 237-8). We're permitted, then, to trade some degree of beneficence for the purposes of self-cultivation. (Cf. Timmerman 2006; and Igneski 2008).

The extent to which duties to self (self-perfection) can mitigate the demandingness of duties to others (beneficence) isn't at all clear, though. First, it's unclear how we should go about trying to balance between obligatory ends. It seems there are at least better and worst

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[34] Barbara Herman offers a similar defense in "The Scope of Moral Requirement" (*Moral Literacy*, 213-229, 2007). She argues that Kant's moral theory makes "some robust level of concern for oneself obligatory" and, hence, there's a limit to the demandingness of the duty of beneficence (228).

ways of doing so. E.g., if I fail to rescue the toddler who's walking into oncoming traffic because it might eat into the time I have allocated for my piano practice or for training for the 5k marathon, then it seems like I am *impermissibly* inflating the moral significance of talent-cultivation over the fundamental needs of others. To be sure, I cannot completely neglect my non-moral talents either. So, I am not permitted to be completely other-focused either. If that were even possible, the kind of self-neglected that involves would probably strike many as bizarre and pathological. I am thus permitted to engage in self-cultivation at least *sometimes* rather than furthering other people's ends, including their most basic and fundamental needs. Yet that doesn't mean moral life won't still be severely diachronically demanding in relation to meeting the duty of beneficence. There is an overwhelming amount of needless, pointless, preventable suffering in the world; and the duty to address it remains steadfast.

Second, it is also questionable whether the duty to develop one's talents is entirely congruent with one's "personal projects" and one's happiness, as Baron and others seem to implicitly assume. One might respond on their behalf by invoking Kant's claim that the degree to which anyone is obligated to sacrifice her welfare will be limited by or dependent upon "each person's true needs" (MM 6:393). A person's "true needs" are to be determined by the person himself, Kant says (ibid). The true needs of an individual presumably aren't identical to her *existential* needs, e.g., shelter, food, etc., but reflect her personality, character, moral and non-moral values, and the idiosyncratic projects that occupy a central place in her conception of the Good. These all seem to be central in facilitating a person's happiness. But the notion of "true needs" doesn't seem sufficient to mitigate the duty of beneficence to any great extent either. Say that my true need is to purchase as many luxury cars as possible or something that would strike most as equally trivial next to the misery generated by global poverty—it seems

(again) impermissible to prioritize such desires, even if they count as "true needs," over and above other people's *fundamental* needs, just as it seemed impermissible to prioritize the cultivation of talent in cases of face-to-face emergencies. Furthermore, as van Ackeren and Sticker argue, "if satisfying true needs is so important then surely there is considerable rational pressure on me to help others satisfy *their* true needs and maybe even to sacrifice the satisfaction of my own true needs if I could help satisfy the true needs of others more effectively than I can promote my own" (2018, 424).

Thirdly, one mustn't forget that the cultivation of one's talents is a *duty* and hence must be *motivated* by the fact that it's a duty rather than by one's inclinations. Satisfaction of inclination is therefore not really part of the pursuit at all, even though it might be contingently involved. The duty might require one to continue with projects that one might be otherwise inclined to abandon, in fact. Suppose that Frank has invested time in a certain talent—say, he is very well-suited to become a surgeon and has already invested a lot of time in medical school—but Frank has grown bored with the medical profession and would greatly prefer doing something else, say, becoming a full-time painter instead, even though Frank completely lacks artistic talent. In that case, if Frank ceases to cultivate his talents as a surgeon by leaving his career, that could count as a violation of his imperfect duty, a violation of his duty to *himself*.[35] The fulfillment of our self-directed duties isn't at all identical to doing what will satisfy our inclinations or guarantee our happiness, then, but can even be the source of a serious *conflict* with our inclinations (and therefore with our happiness).

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[35] This also raises a difficult question about cases where the agent has no substantive talents at all. Is it a duty to cultivate mediocre talents at the expense of people's most basic interests?

There is one additional possibility in Kantian ethics for moderating severe diachronic demandingness of beneficence: special obligations. The commonsense view is that we have special duties that pertain to particular individuals, in light of our relation to them, e.g., parents have special obligations to their children, obligations which they don't have towards the children of others (MM 6:280). People have obligations towards their spouses (MM 6:422), towards friends (MM 6:469) and towards co-nationals (MM 6:422), and to those who are especially nearby (MM 6:451). These kinds of obligations seem like good candidates for mitigating the stringency of beneficence. This is partly because special obligations allow for partiality, but, also, because I am liable to violate my special obligations, if I devote *too* much time, effort, and resources to furthering the end of beneficence. I cannot neglect my children's welfare for the sake of ensuring the survival of far-off strangers. This does indeed seem to mitigate the stringency of beneficence. But how much? Parents aren't required to *maximize* their children's welfare or happiness, although it may no doubt be their inclination to do so. The satisfaction of their special obligations extends to ensuring (minimally) that their children are adequately cared for: fed, clothed, housed, and educated, etc. Once these obligations are (minimally) met, a significant amount of resources would still be available for promoting the obligatory end of beneficence. Prioritizing negligible increments in the happiness of one's children over meeting the existential needs of strangers seems, again, to be contrary to practical reason. I wouldn't let a toddler drown just because that would mean I'll be late in dropping off my child at soccer practice.

In the present global context, the Kantian duty of beneficence would seem to impose serious costs and burdens on individuals in the pursuit of their conception of the Good. Unless, as a matter of contingent fact, there happens to be (near) complete harmony between

morality's demands and one's inclinations, severe diachronic demandingness will be the lot for those who have resources that greatly exceed their own needs. Can we at least claim that the Kantian form diachronic demandingness isn't as severe as the utilitarian kind? This seems warranted by the consideration that utilitarianism is a maximizing moral theory and Kantian moral theory isn't. Utilitarianism requires agents to do well beyond addressing the existential needs of others. As we saw, though, it is not entirely clear that this is true. If Sidgwick is right to claim that happiness is best promoted when we're focusing on ourselves, our loved ones, and our neighbors, then utilitarianism wouldn't necessarily be much more demanding than Kantianism would in a world that's not in a constant emergency situation. Until that world is on the horizon, it seems utilitarianism and Kantianism, if taken seriously, both result in severe diachronic demandingness, in a life of prodigious self-sacrifice.[36]

3.3. Schopenhauerian Demandingness

Nietzsche popularized the notion that morality is "anti-life," as I mentioned earlier. But the idea itself probably came to him from his engagement with Schopenhauer's moral philosophy. Schopenhauer explicitly understood ethics in life-negating terms. So, for instance, he writes that, "the inner essence of virtue will prove to be a striving that tends in a direction diametrically opposed to that of happiness, i.e., of well-being and life" (WWR I: 388). Although Schopenhauer isn't considered to be a member of the canon of ethics, his relevance shouldn't

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[36] In this connection, see Ashford (2000, 2003) and Hills (2010) on the demandingness of utilitarianism versus contractualism under ideal (or less extreme) global conditions for humans. One important difference concerns the moral status ascribed to non-human animals. Insofar as utilitarians recognize the moral importance of non-human animals, their theory might impose many additional demands on them than Kantianism (and contractualism) would.

be understated for our purposes. He's indispensable for situating Nietzsche's own views, and especially in relation to moral demandingness, as Schopenhauer's ethics is very, perhaps even impossibly, demanding. This, moreover, hasn't (as far as I know) received any discussion at all in the secondary literature either. From the vantage point of Scheffler's Features, I'll suggest, the major source of Schopenhauerian demandingness comes from the content of his ethics, or from the stringency of compassion.

First, note, that while utilitarians and Kantians think that happiness and morality are at least potentially congruent, while Schopenhauer seems to deny even this. On his view, there seems to be a deep, unbridgeable chasm between moral goodness and happiness. They are "diametrically opposed." To understand why Schopenhauer thinks so, we will need to situate his ethics within his philosophical *pessimism*. For Schopenhauer, life is in its essence nothing but *will*, a blind, endless, 'striving.' The natural attitude of living creatures is to affirm the will, or, rather, their *own* will, namely, egoism. But egoism is the essence of immorality, for Schopenhauer. It is privileging one's own ego over and at (often) the expense of the needs and interests of others. The morally good person is, by contrast, compassionate. She cares about the welfare of others—even animals—for their own sake, and not because it'll benefit or further her individual interests and aims.

How is it possible to inhabit the compassionate standpoint, if the natural standpoint— the standpoint of life—is that of egoism? It must, Schopenhauer claims, involve a momentary *transcendence* of the natural attitude and the narrow, myopic, self-centered point of view of the ego; it is, rather, a metaphysical insight into the illusoriness of individuality (phenomena) and the unity of all life, nature, and being (noumena) that makes compassion possible. There's a strong normative similarity here with Sidgwick's idea of the "point of view of the universe."

For Sidgwick, the point of view of the universe shows us that we're all equally important. It is an insight into the intuitive truth of impartiality. From Schopenhauer's metaphysical point of view, we similarly recognize that, as individuals, we are no more important than anyone else; we grasp the fundamental insight that we are even, inwardly and essentially, one and the same being as them.[37] The view is summarized well in Schopenhauer's following comments:

> Let us take the rare and exceptional case of a human being in possession of a considerable income, who uses very little of it for himself and gives everything else to those in need, renouncing many pleasures and comforts. If we want to clarify this human being's deeds, then, apart from any dogma he might use to make himself intelligible to his own reason, we find, as the simplest, most general expression, the essential character of his way acting, that he *makes less of a distinction than is usually made between himself and others*. This holds true even though the distinction is so great in many other people's eyes that the suffering of others is a source of direct pleasure for malicious people, which unjust people see it as a welcome means of promoting their own well-being; this holds true even though people are merely just find it enough not to cause suffering; it holds true even though most people generally know and are familiar with the countless sufferings of others in their vicinity and do not decide to alleviate them, because doing so would require some sacrifices on their part. Although in each of these cases, a powerful distinction seems to be in effect between one's own I and that of others, this difference is not so significant for the noble-minded sort of person we are discussing. The *principium individuationis*, the form of appearance, no longer has him quite so tightly in its grip; the suffering he sees in others affects him almost as much as his own, so he tries to establish equilibrium between the two, giving up pleasures and undertaking renunciations to alleviate other people's suffering. He is aware that the difference

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[37] The "metaphysical insight" has been interpreted differently by scholars. Christopher Janaway (2007) argues that the ultimate insight the compassionate agent grasps is that we're all equally intrinsically *worthless* from the 'point of view of the universe;' none of us have any real significance at all. Sandra Shapshay (2019) has raised doubts about this. She argues that, If the compassionate agent intuits the worthlessness of all living beings, then she wouldn't, *pace* Schopenhauer's explicit claim, be motivated to act on that compassion at all (2019, 180). She suggests, instead, that the Schopenhauerian insight is into the "unfathomable significance" of every living being; it's an insight into their *worth*, not their worthlessness. But what about the traditional interpretation of the metaphysical insight, i.e., that compassion recognizes the unity of all beings as numerically one and the same will? Compassion pierces through the veil of *principium individuationis* and annihilates the difference between the "I" and "not-I" altogether. Schopenhauer does develop this view in several places, as Shapshay notes. Perhaps its most crucial philosophical weakness, though—and I say this in support of Shapshay—is that it threatens to reduce compassion into egoism. If the compassionate agent ultimately just sees himself in everyone, then, *pace* Schopenhauer once more, he never acts on behalf of others at all; his concern starts and ends always only with the 'dear (metaphysical) self.' Thus, the common metaphysical interpretation contradicts the *moral* value and possibility of compassion itself, which, as Shapshay says, expresses "a keen sense of the *separateness* of the other" (154). Or in Schopenhauer's words, "we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine it is ours" (OBM 203).

between himself and others … belongs only to a fleeting and illusory appearance: he recognizes, immediately and without inference, that the in-itself of his own appearance is the in-itself of other people's too, that is it the will to life, and that it constitutes the essence of every single thing and is alive in all things; indeed, he recognizes that this extends even to animals and the whole of nature: which is why he does not want to hurt animals either (WWR I: 399).

But now, Schopenhauer says, the person who truly attains this insight—understands what it means that everything is "will"—becomes, first, acutely aware of the ubiquitous misery that abounds in the world: "He recognizes the whole, comprehends its essence, and finds that it is constantly passing away, caught up in vain strivings, inner conflict, and perpetual suffering. Wherever he looks, he sees the sufferings of humanity, the sufferings of the animal kingdom, and a fleeting, fading world" (WWR I: 405-6). And second, he begins to ask whether this world, with its infinite suffering, is worthy of being affirmed at all. Thus, the will "begins turning away from life" (ibid). The compassionate agent attains the recognition that, if the essence of life is will, then the essence of life is suffering. Schopenhauer compares life to a "circular path made of red-hot coals with a few cools places, where we are forced going around and around the circle" (ibid). The natural, unphilosophical attitude often fixates on those 'cool' spots, where some respite from willing is achieved, before continuing to trek the endless, flesh-scorching course; but the person who grasps the metaphysical insight will "is not susceptible to such comfort: he sees himself on all points of the circle simultaneously, and steps away. — His will reverses course, and no longer affirms his own being, mirrored in appearance, but negates it instead. The phenomenon in which this is revealed is the transition from virtue to *asceticism*" (WWR I: 406-7). The ascetic, unlike the moral saint, "is no longer satisfied with loving others as himself and doing as much for them as for himself;" he recognizes the futility of alleviating the suffering of the world; he condemns and renounces it instead—he turns away

from life—and, thus, we see that morality is ultimately, as Nietzsche said, *anti*-life. Ethics is a step in the ladder towards the recognition of the truth of pessimism, and is thereby a step towards self-renunciation, which is the only proper response to the truth of pessimism.

So, Schopenhauer adds, "justice" is merely a "means of advancing self-renunciation" (WWR II: 606). He claims that true righteousness is "so heavy a task" that anyone who really pursues it wholeheartedly must make such sacrifices that his life cannot be an enjoyable one (ibid). The denial of the will, resignation, results from the recognition that there's nothing one can do to ultimately change or transform the fundamental character of existence—and that fundamental character is one of suffering, competition, injustice, the whole drama of the will-to-live. The futility of morality makes us turn away from the world and wish for *another* one, beyond this one, a world that, Schopenhauer says, is inconceivable to us, but for which we nevertheless yearn.

Recently, Sandra Shapshay (2019) has complicated this traditional picture. She doesn't deny that Schopenhauer was a pessimist, of course. But she claims that, alongside the familiar curmudgeonly Schopenhauer, there is another Schopenhauer, a "Knight with Hope," who believed that it is possible to remedy and alleviate the suffering and injustice of the world to *some* non-negligible degree. For Shapshay, this becomes more apparent, if we attend to Schopenhauer's principle of morality in *On the Basis of Morality* (1839/1841). Schopenhauer's principle says, "Harm no one; rather help everyone to the extent you can" (OBM 149). This is the principle of compassion, from which Schopenhauer derives two chief "virtues," viz., *justice* ("harm no one") and *philanthropy* ("help everyone"). But, Shapshay argues, if we adopt the canonical, instrumentalist reading of Schopenhauer's ethics—which casts compassion in the role of a mere handmaiden to resignation—then the principle lapses into paradox. It lapses

into paradox because the two parts of the principle are *incompatible* with one another on such an interpretation. If, as Schopenhauer claims, the will-to-live locks living beings inevitably and fundamentally into a painful competition with one another, then it's impossible to affirm the will *and* satisfy the principle's first half, "Harm no one." The only option is renunciation of the will-to-live. But if one renounces the will-to-live, then it becomes impossible to satisfy the principle's second half: caring about and alleviating the suffering of others ("help") as far as possible. Moreover, compassion tends to frustrate the ends of renunciation. The alleviation of suffering is far less likely to prompt denial of the will-to-live than to reinvigorate hope in the possibility of progress. Thus, the traditional instrumentalist reading "*masks a fundamental conflict at the heart of Schopenhauer's ethical thought:* Renunciation is likely hindered by many acts of compassion; and compassionate action is likely undermined by renunciation" (Shapshay 2019, 32). Shapshay's suggestion, then, is that Schopenhauer's philosophy should be interpreted as offering two incompatible ethical ideals—compassion and resignation—rather than claiming compassion is a mere instrument for resignation. It's essential to note, though, that Shapshay does *not* think Schopenhauer's non-pessimistic ideal signals a transition to philosophical optimism. Even the "Knight with Hope" recognizes the world is still filled with undeserved, irredeemable, and profound suffering, but he nevertheless also recognizes that significant improvement is possible, though never guaranteed.[38]

I am not interested in wading into Schopenhauer scholarship, though. The point I would like to make is that whichever reading of Schopenhauer or ethical ideal he endorsed,

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[38] Shapshay's view therefore preserves one of the most attractive elements (in my mind) of Schopenhauer's ethics, i.e., the significance of *recognizing and bearing witness to suffering* rather than ignoring, denying, distorting, or 'explaining it away' (e.g., as punishment for sin), but *without* succumbing to the equally unattractive, passivity-inducing, responsibility-shirking trap of hopelessness about the possibility of alleviating this suffering.

his ethics will be severely demanding. The two ideals Shapshay discusses both involve *renunciation of egoism*. The compassionate agent is moved by the misery and suffering of the world; she recognizes that this means renouncing the affirmation of the ego, i.e., her personal comforts, individualistic projects, etc. Moreover, she recognizes that she must work to alleviate the suffering of non-human animals too. And all of this contradicts her natural inclinations to the fullest degree; it is fundamentally at odds with her natural disposition as a living being.[39] The resignationist ethical ideal isn't any less demanding, though. There's nothing easy about asceticism either because it similarly requires the abandonment of one's egoism, the renunciation of pleasures, etc., but not for the sake of alleviating the woes of others. Asceticism shares more than merely superficial similarities with compassion, in fact. Schopenhauer says that asceticism is "further manifested in voluntary and intentional poverty … by giving away property to alleviate other people's suffering, but as a goal in itself, and should serve as constant mortification of the will, so that no satisfaction of wishes, the sweets of life, can excite the will loathed by self-knowledge" (WWR I: 408). In any case, asceticism is incredibly difficult because it demands overcoming, in Schopenhauer's view, life itself. Few (if any) living beings have been capable of achieving this. Indeed, Schopenhauer himself didn't. As Nietzsche reminds us, Schopenhauer played the flute every evening after dinner. Nietzsche quips: "is that really a pessimist?" (BGE §186).

The demandingness, as I noted, results from the stringency of the content of morality in Schopenhauer's system. Here we should add that, insofar as existence endlessly abounds

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[39] The demands of compassion might also be compounded by Schopenhauer's rejection of aggregation. Schopenhauer's ethics is more "individualistic" than classical utilitarianism (Shapshay 2019, 81). He says that "even if thousands had lived in happiness and joy [this] would never do away with the anguish and death-agony of one individual" (WWR II: 576). He also denies that undeserved suffering could ever be "balanced" by any amount of pleasure or happiness, "along with it or after it" (WWR II: 576).

with suffering, the demands of Schopenhauerian compassion will also have a pervasive scope. There's no escape from the 'cry of the flesh' because that cry is literally *everywhere*. Yet, it's worth noting that Schopenhauer doesn't construe morality as overriding in Scheffler's sense, i.e., as *rationally* overriding. Schopenhauer downgrades the role of reason in his ethics; and he denies that there are any moral "oughts" (OBM II, *passim*). Likewise, the downgrading of reason also accompanies a downgrading of deliberative reflection, too. Schopenhauer writes, "we will not hesitate to contradict *Kant* directly, who would only acknowledge true goodness and virtue as such when they emerge from abstract reflection" (WWR I: 402).

Schopenhauer's ethics seems to force the *ultimate dilemma* more strongly than Kantianism or utilitarianism. If morality has authority for us, then it demands a life of self-sacrifice, and this would seem, moreover, to be true quite independently of external circumstances. The world is will, and willing is suffering. Unless the world is transcended, there's no end to the moral task of alleviating its misery; and that's simply because its misery is endless. One can deny morality's rational authority, of course, as Schopenhauer does, but, in some respect, that is precisely the point: if one genuinely values moral goodness, one must recognize the demandingness of moral value; and to deny this demandingness is to *give up* on its value. So, we see that Schopenhauer ushers us right to the precipice that, I think, Nietzsche recognized and warned us about: morality and demandingness *or* nihilism and nothingness.

4. Nietzsche and Moral Demandingness

To summarize, in this chapter, I have, first, sketched the central question I am interested in addressing and some reasons for its importance. The central question is whether morality is

severely diachronically demanding from a commonsense perspective. This doesn't mean I am not interested in whether it is demanding in the "philosophical" sense too. My concern is just more practical. The grip that the topic of moral demandingness can exercise on many of us, I think, arises partly from the basic phenomenology of ethical life: we experience the moral landscape as *calling out* to us and *demanding* a response; and we cannot simply turn away or refuse to engage or pretend we're deaf to the world or to ourselves. As Sartre puts it, we're "condemned" to be free, condemned to act. But, as Simone de Beauvoir would surely add, this landscape is also phenomenologically ambiguous; and that's why we must supplement our thought with philosophical reflection. Addressing the issue of moral demandingness is a partial attempt to begin to sort out this ambiguity. *Not* so that we can eliminate it, which isn't possible, but so that we can gain some footing in determining how we ought to respond to it, e.g., how should we respond to the multiplicity of calls and demands from family, friends, strangers, fellow creatures, etc. considering the circumstances of life?

Secondly, I argued that Kantianism, utilitarianism, and Schopenhauerian ethics can be plausibly construed as severely diachronically demanding moral theories. If our best moral theories are demanding, I have suggested, then this provides some evidence that *morality* is demanding, i.e., on any plausible construal of morality, it turns out to make serious demands on agents given the current conditions of the world.[40] I cannot, though, establish this in any conclusive sense. I am only interested in demonstrating that it is a serious issue, and that

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[40] I have left out two other important theories that a complete investigation should include: virtue ethics and care ethics. There are reasons to think that both would be very demanding, though, I think, insofar as they recognize the importance of beneficence as well. There's not enough work on virtue ethics and demandingness but see Swanton (2009) and Tessman (2005). Care ethics, with its strong emphasis on compassion, vulnerability, oppression, and marginalization (which reflect its basis in feminism) also, I think, tends towards a high degree of demandingness. See, for instance, Robert Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable* (1985) and Sara Ruddick *Maternal Thinking* (1989).

Nietzsche would have had good reasons to be attuned to it insofar as it manifests itself in the moral philosophy that characterized his historical period and his philosophical interests.[41]

But, still, this doesn't tell us much about Nietzsche's views concerning demandingness. That's the major task of the chapters ahead. In Chapter 2, I begin to examine this question via a critique of Brian Leiter (1997, 2019a), who—in an attempt to place a philosophical wedge between Nietzsche and Williams—claims that Nietzsche wasn't at all concerned with moral demandingness, but with something else, namely, the flourishing of genius. I will argue that, if we adopt Leiter's interpretation of Nietzsche, we'll see that Nietzsche had very *good* reasons to concern himself with moral demandingness in Williams' sense. In Chapter 3, I will provide an account of Nietzsche's conception of moral demandingness itself, i.e., what *makes* morality demanding, on Nietzsche's view. This involves reconstructing a genealogy of demandingness, which, I argue, can be reconstructed from Nietzsche's genealogy of guilt and obligation in the Second Treatise of *The Genealogy of Morality* (1887). In Chapter 4, I examine Nietzsche's evaluation of moral demandingness: what (if anything) was Nietzsche's objection to moral demandingness? Answering this question will enable us to rethink, I claim, the relationship between Nietzsche and much of the contemporary literature on this issue, as Nietzsche's (re)evaluation is more surprising than we'd expect the famous "immoralist's" view to be.

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[41] Leiter (1997, 2019a), we'll see, denies that Nietzsche was interested in moral theory, though. According to Leiter, Nietzsche's concern is with moral culture. I don't disagree; I only note that Nietzsche was interested in moral theory as a cultural phenomenon. Philosophers don't work in a vacuum, after all.

Chapter 2

Nietzsche, Williams, and Moral Demandingness

Williams and Nietzsche are both (in)famous for their critiques of morality. In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams analogized morality to antebellum American slavery—the "peculiar institution"—with the implication that morality is a philosophically bankrupt system of human domination that "we would be better off without" (ELP 174). Nietzsche called himself an "immoralist" (e.g., BGE §226, TI "Skirmishes" §32; EH VI §2-4; BT P: §5). Morality, for him, isn't merely false and illegitimate, it is also *bad* and its values should be overturned. This, of course, doesn't mean that Nietzsche and Williams were interested in abolishing *ethics*, i.e., an informal set of internalized and socially enforced norms that regulate relations between people and furnish standards for evaluating people's character, motives,

actions, etc.[42] Ethics, in this broader sense, is not their target. They are interested in *morality*: a historically specific form of ethical life that has its roots in Judaism and Christianity. There are some good reasons to think that Williams inherited a great deal from Nietzsche's critique of morality in this "narrower" (rather than "broad") sense (BGE §32). He did after all consider Nietzsche to be the "greatest moral philosopher" since the 19th century.[43] But there is also an important sense in which the two seem to be remarkably different. Brian Leiter (2019a, 2007, 1997) has argued in a set of papers that, while Williams was concerned with safeguarding the pleasantries, joys, and small comforts of modern, liberal-democratic, "bourgeois" life against the domineering demandingness of moral obligation, Nietzsche's primary concern was with safeguarding the flourishing of so-called "higher types," e.g., the Goethes, Beethovens, Shakespeares, and Nietzsches of the future, from the trappings of excellence-destroying moral values. Williams' humanistic individualism (see ELP "Postscript") clashes with Nietzsche's hierarchical elitism. Although I think that Williams really does owe a substantive debt to Nietzsche, this chapter's main aim is to offer a critique specifically of Leiter's analysis of the Nietzsche-Williams schism rather than to demonstrate Nietzsche's influence on Williams.[44] I will argue that Leiter's own reading of Nietzsche's normative critique loses much of its force *unless* it incorporates Williams' view about the demandingness of morality, i.e., precisely the

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[42] It also doesn't mean that Nietzsche rejected the common stock of moral concepts and practices: justice, fairness, blame, punishment, etc. He did, however, reject the specifically *moral* interpretation of these concepts. See Clark 2015, chapter 1.

[43] Here' the full quote: "It is certain, even if not everyone has yet come to see it, that Nietzsche was the greatest moral philosopher of the past century. This was, above all, because he saw how totally problematical morality, as understood over many centuries, has become, and how complex a reaction that fact, when fully understood required" (2014, 183). This was from a review he wrote in 1981.

[44] For that, see Clark, "On the Rejection of Morality: Bernard Williams' Debt to Nietzsche" (2001/2015), and Clark & Hanauer, "On the Demandingness of Morality: Bernard Williams' Debt to Nietzsche" (unpublished).

view that Leiter dismisses. The goal, however, isn't merely to poke holes in Leiter's interpretation of Nietzsche. The discussion here will serve as a springboard for the views I'll be developing over the next two chapters. In Chapter 3, I reconstruct Nietzsche's conception of demandingness, or the "genealogy" of moral demandingness. And, in Chapter 4, after addressing Nietzsche's (re)evaluation of moral demandingness, will we be adequately positioned to reassess the schism between Williams, Nietzsche, and other contemporary "Demandingness Critics" (e.g., Susan Wolf). As we will eventually see, there is indeed an important difference between Nietzsche and Williams, but it's *not* the one that most readers—including Leiter himself—would expect. Williams, like other contemporary morality critics, took the demandingness of morality to be a reason to reject the "morality system." Nietzsche, however, could be plausibly read as taking this demandingness to be a good-making feature of morality, perhaps one of its most important contributions to human life, even though he didn't think it is *unconditionally* good.

1. Williams contra Nietzsche on Moral Demandingness?

The problem of moral demandingness is by no means new, as we saw in Chapter 1. It can be traced even as far back as William Godwin's proto-utilitarianism in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Godwin argued that morality is stringently impartial and, therefore, it is immoral to favor some people over others for exclusively partial reasons, e.g., because they happen to be one's family members. There may even be instances where morality requires sacrificing one's mother—say, if one's mother is a lowly maid—in order to save another individual—say, a rich, magnanimous philanthropist—for the greater good of humanity. But,

in contemporary moral philosophy, the problem of moral demandingness has become closely associated with Bernard Williams. It is important at the outset to note that, as our discussion in Chapter 1 indicated, the problem of demandingness is really best understood as a family or collection of interrelated problems. There is no *the* problem of demandingness. This diversity is clearly reflected in Williams' own work, where at least two different formulations of the problem are discernible. In unfortunately vague terms, we can say that one formulation raises the demandingness problem in relation to our *standpoint* while the other raises the problem in relation to *life*.

Williams' earliest formulation (1973) of the problem involves the former notion of demandingness (*standpoint*)—and it is specifically addressed to act utilitarianism as its target. William's basic charge is that act utilitarianism is incompatible with having real or substantive commitments, the type of commitments that shape one's identity or constitute one's character and give 'wholeness' to one's agency; it requires estrangement from one's "ground projects," i.e., those projects that an agent "take[s] seriously at the deepest level, as being what his life is about." Act utilitarianism demands that an agent *view* and *relate* to her projects from the perspective or standpoint of utility maximization, and that, Williams says, is a direct assault on an agent's "integrity." The demand to view her ground projects as if their value was conditioned by their favorable or unfavorable contribution to the "utility network" is, for Williams, tantamount to banishing the agent herself. Hence, we will call this the standpoint problem of demandingness, or *Demandingness-S* for brevity.[45]

This first formulation of the problem needs to be distinguished from Williams' second,

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[45] For some important contributions to the literature on integrity, see Scheffler (1982), Conoly (1983), Herman (1993), Railton (1984), Ashford (2000), Thomas (2005), and Chappell (2007).

which can be found in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985). The second formulation is the one that Leiter seems to have in mind when he's critiquing Williams. This formulation takes the "morality system" as its target. The morality system includes utilitarianism, but it is primarily Kantian (duty-centric), and its distinguishing feature is the special concept of "moral obligation." In this context, the problem of demandingness isn't concerned with the accommodation of the agent's first-personal perspective or identification, but rather more concretely with how she actually lives her life. The problem is that morality may come to "dominate a life altogether," if the notion of moral obligation is permitted to "structure ethical thought" (ELP 181-2). The demandingness that is baked into the concept of moral obligation—as a product of its special features—creates the tendency towards downgrading non-moral values and concerns, e.g., personal relationships, "ground projects," aesthetic experiences, etc.[46] Consequently, moral obligation forces agents to push these non-moral goods out of their lives and corrodes agents' attachments to values and ends that don't fit within the scope of morality's demands. Morality's "domination," then, consists in its monopolization of an individual's life for *its* ends rather than the agent's, or in its iron-fisted control over the evaluative sphere and its tyrannical relation to the non-moral values within it. Let's call this formulation of the problem *Demandingness-L* and flesh out its details a bit more before continuing.

Demandingness-L expresses *not* the worry that morality will pervert the ways in which we *view* or *identify* with our commitments or values or projects, as with Demandingness-S.

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[46] These are not necessarily 'non-moral,' of course. Interpersonal relationships between friends and family members, for instance, are often paradigms of moral relations. But there is an obvious limit: letting people die just to prevent a slight discomfort for one's child would be recognized as highly immoral, and language is strained if we characterize the choice between them as a tradeoff between *moral* goods. If the reader prefers, however, we can call these "lesser moral goods."

Rather, Demandingness-L is a problem that threatens to arise even if the moral 'point of view' is something with which we identify and think of as our 'own.' The problem is about the manner in which moral demands come to *accumulate* and hence eventually fail to respect the sense in which "each person has a life to lead" (ELP 186). This happens as a result of into special features of moral obligation and the morality system:

1) **Ought implies can**: Moral obligation applies to actions that are under an agent's control such that, if an agent morally ought to A, then she *can* A (ELP 175)

2) **Overridingness**: If an agent is morally obligated to A, then the obligation overrides all other *non-moral* aims and considerations to not do A[47]

3) **Inescapability**: If an agent is morally obligated to A, then her obligation to A is inescapable or doesn't depend on her contingent desires and preferences (ELP 177)

4) **Blame**: If an agent is morally obligated to A, then her failure to A will make her an apt target of other-directed or self-directed blame, i.e., indignation or guilt (ELP 177).

But these features aren't yet sufficient for showing how moral obligations come to over-accumulate such that they begin to dominate people's lives. This happens, Williams explains, as a result of the morality system's pressure towards construing ethical life almost entirely in terms of moral obligation: it tries to reduce as many ethical considerations "as possible into

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[47] The notion of "overridingness" here should be understood (I think) in Scheffler's sense as suggesting that a moral obligation provides one with an all-things-considered or authoritative *reason* to do as the obligation commands.

obligations" (ELP 179). This involves

5) **The Obligation-out, obligation-in principle**: there must be some more *general* moral obligation that backs any *particular* moral obligation; and

6) **The "only an obligation can beat an obligation" principle**: a moral obligation can be overridden only by *another* moral obligation (ELP 180-181).

So, Williams writes, "Once the journey into more general obligations has started, we may begin to get into trouble … with finding room for morally indifferent actions" (ELP 181). For instance, say that Susan feels obligated to save someone who's in an emergency situation (drowning, say). The morality system will pressure her to interpret this feeling in terms of a more general obligation that requires people in general to help others under conditions of emergency, if doing so is possible. Following this logic in conscious deliberation—as Peter Singer (1972) does—will likely lead Susan to the conclusion that she really morally ought to be doing much more (and is blameworthy for not doing more) to alleviate the plights of those millions or billions who are in a constant emergency situation around the world rather than doing things that she is under no moral obligation to do, e.g., whether it's watching Netflix or spending money on frivolous luxuries.

Isn't Susan's reasoning too quick, though? Aren't there plenty of countervailing considerations that should stop her from drawing such an extremely demanding conclusion? For instance, couldn't the morality system recognize special obligations towards one's family and friends, or even towards oneself? Considerations of relationships seem to matter in figuring out *who* has an obligation to who in a further way too: it seems right to obligate Susan

to help when she's the only person who *can* help, but not so much when millions of others are in a position to help as much (or even more) than herself, as is the case with global poverty. Shouldn't the obligation fall first on the needy stranger's family, friends, or co-nationals before it falls on us; and shouldn't our obligation to help in local ways—that is, to assist our friends, family, and co-nationals—take precedence over the obligation to help needy strangers? In relation to these questions, Williams thinks that the morality system's drive towards generalization results in the unmooring of moral obligations from local, concrete, and particularized social relations. It is *Susan's* obligation to save *this* person from drowning because *he* needs *her* help immediately, and *she* can help *him* immediately. But, once that's generalized, it becomes *everyone's* obligation to help *anyone* with the promotion of their vital or basic interests wherever and whenever help can be administered. As Williams says, "there are no clear boundaries between the demands on me and the demands on someone else" (1985, 77).[48] The 'thick' character of the benefactor's concrete relationship to the beneficiary is rendered irrelevant. It's immaterial whether the benefactor is the beneficiary's father or colleague or co-national or whether they're complete strangers to one another; nor does it matter whether others are failing to live up to the obligation or not—it applies to everyone equally, full stop. In relation to the former question, Williams' view seems to be that the morality system is

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[48] Williams is discussing utilitarianism in this context, but I think he'd want to extend this point to Kantian ethical framework(s) too. For utilitarianism, the obligations become unmoored because the focus is on maximizing states of affairs—happiness—and everyone has an equal obligation to do that as far as they can. But, for Kantians, moral obligations also become unmoored because they apply to us as *rational* beings. They're general or universal in character. So, although the obligation isn't to bring about a certain state of affairs, it still applies to me as a rational agent unconditionally. In other words, it doesn't arise from my concrete relationships and 'thick' identity, but from a thin, all-inclusive, universal conception of myself as a rational agent. This is a well-known critique that communitarians (since Hegel) have raised against Kantianism, see, e.g., Michael Sandel (1984), but also, more recently, David Sussman (2015).

impartial ("Persons, Character, Morality" 1981) and therefore requires us to give equal weight to the interests of others as we do to our own. But it's worth noting that, even if there is some room for partial love within the framework, that wouldn't be sufficient to make the morality system undemanding. There is a definite limit to the extent one is allowed to favor oneself or one's family and friends over others. And, apart from all the above, Williams might suggest that the mere fact one is pressured by the morality system to construe moral life in terms of *moral obligations* at all seems in itself unreasonably demanding and alienating enough.

Moral demands, then, on Williams' view, have a built-in tendency to dominate one's life at the expense of all those other non-moral goods and values that at least, we presume, partly constitute any *recognizable* form of a meaningful human life otherwise. There scarcely is a moment where someone couldn't be fulfilling some important moral demand rather than continuing with the non-obligatory projects and activities that occupy so much of people's lives, like friendships, ivory-tower-type academic careers, or even just sleeping in on Saturday morning. This is Demandingness-L, and that's the kind of demandingness that will concern us. It is essentially another formulation of what I called *Diachronic Demandingness* in Chapter 1. It is the demandingness of morality as it manifests over time. As the demands accumulate, we are left with less time for ourselves and our personal projects. Morality threatens to take over life, not just to take over any specific moment. Demandingness-S can be diachronic, yet it's not necessarily so. I could be required to inhabit the moral standpoint and alienate myself from my projects, etc., *all* the time, but it might also be a deliberative practice that we're only required to adopt on some (perhaps rare) occasions. It is also worth noting, very briefly, that Demandingness-L and Demandingness-S aren't fundamentally different conceptions of moral demandingness. They are both ultimately based on the sacrifices that morality imposes on

agents. The difference between them is about the kind of sacrifice that is being demanded. Demandingness-L emphasizes the costs that can accumulate over a life; Demandingness-S emphasizes the costs in terms of what it means to be an agent who takes on a specific view of the world. The latter dictates a certain way of *looking at* and *relating* to the world, while the former places more emphasis on how one actually *acts* and *lives* in the world.[49]

Brian Leiter (1997, 2007, 2019a), accepts the basic contours of the interpretation I offered above of Demandingness-L; and he takes that to be Williams' primary (normative) objection to morality. In Leiter's view, Nietzsche's critique of morality is worlds apart from Williams' objection in this respect. Nietzsche isn't preoccupied with some overly demanding conception of moral obligation that threatens to "dominate" life, like the one we have just now sketched. Instead, Nietzsche's focus is on the harmful effects that a certain kind of *moral culture* has on a select group of nascent geniuses, the so-called "higher types."[50] Nietzsche's worry is that a culture which extols or carries a pro-attitude towards selflessness, compassion, comfort, equality, and pleasure, and expresses a con-attitude towards suffering, competition, and hierarchy (etc.) will stifle these nascent higher persons from realizing their full potential. Leiter cobbles these pro and con-attitudes together under the title of "Morality in the

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[49] Some philosophers seem to think that Demandingness-S and Demandingness-L are connected in that the former leads to the latter. That is, the way in which morality requires us to relate to the world also gives rise to the excessive accumulation of demands. David Brink (1986) seems to think that the property of impartiality gives rise to very stringent demands, for example. The demand to view the world in an impartial manner, it might be thought, will lead to an ever increasing pile of demands. Scheffler discusses—and dismisses—this approach in *Human Morality* (1992, chapter 6).

[50] See Leiter's *Nietzsche on Morality* (2002), chapter 4, for his detailed account of Nietzsche's "higher types." For a critique of Leiter's approach, see Huddleston (2019, chapter 9). Huddleston argues that Nietzsche's critique of morality isn't primarily or simply that morality is bad because of its causal effects on the "higher types." According to Huddleston, Nietzsche critiques the Christian-moral outlook for "enshrining" certain values independently of the effects these values have on people.

Pejorative Sense" (MPS). If a moral theory or culture embodies some of these attitudes, then it's a target of Nietzsche's critique *because* it thwarts the flourishing and excellence of higher types. So, for instance, Leiter writes, "suffering is a spur to creativity, at least in higher human beings, and a culture that treats suffering as evil, and happiness as the most important end, will divert higher human beings from their potential" (Leiter 2019a, 11). In Zarathustra's words, "that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change" (Z II: 2). (The pro-attitudes and con-attitudes that constitute MPS on Leiter's views can be found in figure 1, on the next page).

Williams often *sounds* as if he's concerned with moral culture too. He claims, for instance, that morality isn't an invention of moral philosophers (ELP 174) and that morality has a "special significance in modern Western culture" (ELP 6). But, as Leiter claims, there's no evidence that most people living in the modern West believe in or feel constrained by Williams' conception of the morality system and its especially demanding notion of moral obligation, other than perhaps a relatively small subset of religious or philosophical 'fanatics.' He writes that, "It is a pure philosopher's fantasy to think that real people in the moral culture at large find themselves overwhelmed by this burdensome sense of moral obligation" (2019a, 7). There is virtually no one—even among moral philosophers—who disagrees with Williams claim that "each person has a life to lead" and that morality cannot simply commandeer an agent's existence for the promotion of morality's ends (ELP 186). Conversely, the moral values that Nietzsche is attacking, e.g., compassion, kindness, equality, comfort, happiness, etc., are still widely praised and extolled, even if they're not strictly followed. At best, then, Williams' concern is with the "incompatibility between morality and the kind of pleasant bourgeois life" that modern university professors like himself enjoy, whereas Nietzsche's concern is with the

Pro-Attitude	Con-Attitude
Happiness	Suffering
Altruism	Self-Love
Equality	Inequality
Peacefulness	Danger
Social utility	That which endangers social utility
Compassion	Indifference to suffering
Well-being of soul	Well-being of body

Fig. 1. "Morality in the Pejorative Sense" (Leiter 2002).

cultural roadblocks that stand in the way of actualizing the "highest power and splendor actually possible to the type man" (Leiter 2019a, 9; GM P: §6). Although the rhetoric is perhaps resonant, the substance couldn't be more different.

2. Moral Demandingness and Nietzsche's Higher Types

2.1. Demandingness and Moral Culture

As we have just seen, on Leiter's view, Nietzsche's focus on the "higher types" explains his preoccupation with the broader sphere of *moral culture*, while Williams' concern with the suffocating demands of moral obligation is actually directed towards the much narrower sphere of *moral theory*. For Leiter, Nietzsche's concerns are in fact reflected in Western culture's promotion of compassion, kindness, equality, etc., while Williams' concerns about moral obligation are entirely divorced from it. This view, however, becomes problematized once we acknowledge that, for Nietzsche, morality (like God) is mostly already dead. So, for instance,

commenting on Christian morality, he says:

> I look around me: there is no longer a word left of what was formerly called 'truth,' we no longer endure it when a priest so much as utters the word 'truth' … *All* the concepts of the church are recognized for what they are: the most malicious false-coinage there is for the purpose of *disvaluing* nature and natural values … Everyone knows this: *and everyone none the less remains unchanged.* When have the last feelings of decency gone when even our statesman, in other ways very unprejudiced kind of men and practical anti-Christians through and through, still call themselves Christians today and go to communion? (A §38).

Morality is not a living force in most people's lives. This doesn't mean, of course, that people have ceased to follow ethical norms. Murder is still impermissible; and pedophilia still arouses serious outrage. But, for Nietzsche, whatever moral convictions may remain, they are not a fundamental source of meaning or spiritual nourishment for people. According to Nietzsche, the one group that continues to draw real (though implicit) inspiration from morality in any substantive sense consists, ironically, of those naturalists and philosophers who are hastening morality's complete and final demise in their unremitting pursuit of truth (GM III: §24-25, §27). Leiter's view therefore has Nietzsche beating a dead horse. If morality is already dead, what's there left to attack? Williams, in that case, is at least offering arguments against *something*, even if it's an "invention of philosophers" (ELP 174). But still, Leiter will insist that Western culture is thoroughly infected with moral concepts and values, and that is Nietzsche's real concern. He explains, "Nietzsche's point is that when moral values predominate in a culture, their valuations affect the attitudes of all members of that culture, whether they realize it or not" (2002, 107). True, these moral values might not be taken so seriously by the average person anymore, as Nietzsche suggests, but it is the higher types who are uniquely vulnerable to their spell. Perhaps their special constitution somehow puts them at a greater risk of taking

more seriously the value of selflessness, compassion, equality, and so on.[51] Nietzsche seeks to unchain *them* from morality's grip, but he doesn't care whether the masses themselves remain in its leash (cf. WP §267).

This however is precisely where *Williams'* concerns about moral demandingness—which Leiter dismisses as fantasies—become most relevant. If the higher types take morality seriously, as Leiter suggests, but moral culture is *not* demanding and doesn't impose overriding, stringent, pervasive, and generalized obligations on persons, then why should we think that moral values will interfere so deeply with the higher type's capacity to flourish? Morality's cultural presence may lead higher types to internalize certain moral demands, but if the content of these demands is not itself *demanding*, then the concern that it will thwart the higher types' flourishing is greatly minimized. In short, Leiter's threat is trivialized once we remove the kind of demandingness that Williams ascribes to moral obligation from the domain of moral culture. The higher types can take the moral values that proliferate in culture seriously without needing to devote their lives to moral ends or constrain themselves by following potential-thwarting norms.[52] Moral culture, on this view, leaves significant room for pursuing our own

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[51] This is Leiter's (1997) view, although the evidence he adduces for it from Nietzsche isn't very tight. He quotes, for instance, from GS: "What distinguishes the higher human beings from the lower is that the former see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear more thoughtfully" (GS §301). It's unclear why we should interpret this in Leiter's way. Moreover, the sort of vulnerability that Leiter attributes to the higher types also doesn't square well with other comments Nietzsche makes, e.g., that the higher types "almost always become masters of their epoch" (TI "Skirmishes" §44). Nietzsche also suggests that great human beings always know how to turn bad things to their advantage (EH "Wise" §2). If they didn't overcome these obstacles, these great human beings simply wouldn't *be* great. But then Nietzsche also claims that "the weaker dominate the strong again and again" (TI, "Skirmishes" 14), that the "sick" represent the greatest threat to the "strong" (GM III: §14), and that the "higher the type of man a man represents, the greater the improbability that he will turn out *well*. The accidental, the law of absurdity in the whole economy of mankind, manifests itself most horribly in its destructive effect on the higher men whose complicated conditions of life can only be calculated with great subtlety and difficulty" (BGE §62; cf. BGE §269). And, he says, the "genius" is the "sublimest machine there is—consequently the most fragile" (WP §684). It's unclear how to resolve these tensions. (See Huddleston 2019). I return to this again in Chapter 4.

[52] Leiter (1997, 2002) considers an objection of this sort. He formulates a puzzle ("Harm Puzzle") around the

ends or "ground projects" and neglecting even the deepest injustices or harms that afflict others around the world.

According to Simon Robertson (2011), though, there is still a sense in which even an "undemanding" moral culture would be detrimental to Nietzschean higher types. An undemanding moral culture would recognize some (mostly) negative moral obligations, yet it wouldn't ascribe to these obligations the kind of strong overridingness that defeats all other non-moral considerations. But moral considerations would still remain *pervasive* in such a culture because "on any given occasion, they form part of the explanation for why A does or does not have a moral obligation, and hence part of the explanation for what it is that A ought or ought not to do" (574). Since it is obviously impossible to be perpetually cognizant of all the moral considerations that might bear on one's actions and consciously inform one's practical deliberations, an undemanding moral culture would likely favor a mechanism of internalization—the acquisition of certain "*discriminatory* abilities and dispositions" through socialization (etc.) that render one sensitive to moral considerations that determine one's moral responsibilities in particular occasions and in general (576). Higher types who are raised in a morally undemanding environment of this sort will thereby "be more prone to identify *morally* salient features as reason-giving and to conceptualize that salience with implicit reference to moral categories" (578). They will be more prone to do so because moral values will come to inform their actions, principles, and their self-conception, but also because, as Leiter suggested, they're the ones who are most likely to take moral values and considerations *seriously*.

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question: why should morality interfere with or impede the projects of the higher types? His solution to this, however, is that we're talking about culture rather than theory; and what I am claiming is that, even if we're discussing culture the Harm Puzzle doesn't disappear but simply changes its form.

But is the mere internalization of certain moral norms and a sensitivity to certain moral considerations, e.g., "don't harm others," sufficient to thwart the realization of the excellence that constitutes the potential of Nietzsche's higher types? It is easy to grant that higher types may be more reluctant to kill or steal or violate the negative rights that an "undemanding" moral culture recognizes, if they internalize its moral values and prescriptions. Let's go even further and suppose that higher types under these cultural conditions would be more willing than the average person to engage in gestures of kindness and little acts of benevolent self-sacrifice—they would happily go 'beyond the call of duty.' Even so, the undemanding norms they've internalized and the sensitivities they've cultivated would lead them to act in these ways *only if* doing so isn't 'too costly' or burdensome or interferes significantly with their personal goods, projects, or interests, i.e., their flourishing. Perhaps, though, this would still be a serious roadblock to the flourishing of greatness because, as Robertson suggests, these norms would pose a problem to the "subsidiary ends" or *means* that enable them to achieve their full potential? For instance, if the higher types were truly concerned with ensuring that no one around them suffers from "the most immediate and most direct consequences" (D §146) of their actions, then they wouldn't engage in the kind of work that does inevitably involve making others suffer, like producing controversial literary works or philosophical ideas that others may find offensive, or engaging in competitive activities that separate people into "winners" and "losers," etc. Yet that's not convincing. Surely, anyone who took the general injunction against hurting others as seriously as that would be misconstruing moral culture *and* internalizing its moral norms in a bizarre, myopic, and absurdly insensitive way. Would a higher type claim it is wrong to vaccinate a child just because the most direct and immediate consequence is the momentary painful prick of a needle? Unless the higher type's projects

necessitate murder or serious, unreasonable, and prolonged physical or psychological abuse of others, then the assumption that internalizing other-regarding norms the direct one to refrain from harming others, and developing a sensitivity to the application of these norms, would constitute a serious roadblock for the flourishing of genius, e.g., the creation of sublime artworks or great philosophy, seems rather unwarranted.[53]

Why, really, should we think that respect for basic rights or even an occasional display of charity would prevent another Beethoven or Raphael or even another Nietzsche from emerging? The answer is that only morality as an ideal that demands and inspires allegiance can be a serious threat to *that*. It is the demandingness that's built into morality that truly threatens to commandeer the lives of nascent geniuses and talented persons and channel their energies towards the kinds of projects that morality deems fit rather than towards the development of their own potentials. Nietzsche asks: "What fetters the fastest? What bonds are all but unbreakable?" He answers:

> In the case of men of higher and select kind they will be their *duties*: that reverence proper to youth, that reserve and delicacy before all that is honored and revered from of old, that gratitude for the soil out of which they have grown, for the hand which led them, for the holy place where they learned to worship – their supreme moments themselves will fetter them the fastest, lay upon them the most enduring *obligation* (HH I P: §3; my emphases).

Indeed, if we consider Leiter's claim that Nietzsche's higher type is more attracted to and even

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[53] The possibility that some projects do require inflicting serious harms on others, according to Nietzsche, shouldn't be ruled out. See, for examples, BGE §44, §259; GS §325; TI "Skirmishes" §45; GM I: §11; A §61. Robertson (2011) denies this, though, and points to BGE §260, A §57, and GS §13 as evidence otherwise. If it's true that the higher type's projects sometimes or often require terrible violence, then claiming such violence would be justified or good is possibly the least convincing and least palatable part of Nietzsche's ethics—and it would risk realigning him with the fascists that scholars spent so long distancing him from. It would indeed highlight the radical nature of his immoralism, but for those who take Nietzsche seriously, it might be something better left behind.

seeks out "burdens and responsibilities, as he is driven towards the completion of a unifying project" (2002, 94; cf. WP §944) it becomes much clearer that a highly demanding moral ideal, which requires a great deal of exertion and sacrifice over a long period of time, makes much better sense of the threat to the higher type than a tepid, undemanding, merely regulatory moral code would.[54] The sense of responsibility to follow in the footsteps of (say) Martin Luther King and to have a distinctively *moral* "unifying project" will in any case be just as strong as the sense of urgency to adopt an artistic unifying project and create symphonies that could rival Beethoven's.[55]

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[54] It might be argued, though, that the other characteristics that Leiter identifies as belonging to the nature of higher types demonstrates why an undemanding morality would still pose a problem for them. According to Leiter, the higher types have five dominant traits:

1) 'The higher person is solitary and deals with people only instrumentally' (2002, 116). E.g., see BGE §26, §212; WP §943, EH II: §2, WP §962). For the instrumental relation, see BGE 273 'the higher person considers others as means, obstacles, or temporary resting places.'
2) The higher person has some "unifying project" in mind, which means that he "seeks burdens and responsibilities" (2002, 117). See TI "Skirmishes" §49, EH II: §9.
3) "*The higher type is essentially healthy and resilient*" (2002, 118).
4) "*The higher type affirms life, meaning that he is prepared to will the eternal return of his life*" (2002, 119). This is taking a "Dionysian attitude" towards one's existence, which means being prepared to will all of it again, including the suffering that has went into it.
5) The higher type has self-reverence (2002, 120). See BGE §287, WP §876, GS §55.

Perhaps an undemanding morality would discourage some of these traits, e.g., it certainly wouldn't allow people to relate to each other as mere means, and it would probably discourage self-reverence as a display of arrogance, say. Would that really thwart the flourishing of higher types, though? To what extent do higher types *need* other people for the realization of their projects? Do their projects really require them to treat other people as *mere* means? As Kant recognized, the problem isn't that we treat other people as means; there's nothing essentially wrong with that because it doesn't conflict with recognizing and treating them at the same time as ends-in-themselves. The problem is when we treat them as if they were *nothing but* mere instruments for *our* ends. It's hard to see what kinds of projects the higher type would engage in that would merit such an attitude. But now, what about self-reverence? Wouldn't the higher type be more prone to humility instead? Perhaps, but on the other hand, we've seen in Chapter 1 how even Kantian ethics posits the cultivation of one's talents as an obligatory end. Plus, it seems that moral culture does recognize the importance of *self-respect* more generally, even if we condemn arrogance (see especially Hill 1973, "Servility and Self-Respect," and Timmerman 2006, "Kantian Duties to the Self, Explained and Defended"). Unless the higher type is prone to boast to others or fish for their compliments and admiration—in which case he wouldn't be solitary and would seem to *lack* self-reverence—it's unclear why an undemanding moral culture would prevent him from feeling pride in his work or valuing himself and his achievements, etc.

[55] The urgency to adopt a moral project might even be stronger than adopting a non-moral one if we factor in

2.2. Does Morality Overvalue Happiness and Condemn Suffering?

Although the response just provided may be sufficient in relation to certain strands of morality, e.g., selflessness and beneficence, it might be insufficient in relation to other moral strands that Leiter identifies. This seems especially true about morality's devaluation of suffering and overvaluation of Benthamite-style happiness and herd-animal pleasure.[56] If the higher types internalize a con-attitude towards suffering as such and a pro-attitude towards Benthamite happiness, then they won't be motivated to engage in projects that demand a lot of suffering for their fulfillment, and Nietzsche thinks that all projects that are worthwhile demand a great degree of suffering indeed: "The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering—do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far?" (BGE §225). It's relatively easy to contradict the claim that selflessness is in fact overvalued in a culture such as the 21st century USA where major segments of the population self-righteously choose to privilege utterly negligible increases in their own personal comfort (or "freedom," as they call it) at the expense of the most vulnerable members of their community. But it's much harder to contest the claim that the disvalue of suffering isn't enshrined in the attitudes that constitute

Robertson's points about internalization. The demandingness of moral projects would in itself be attractive, but the fact that one had internalized norms that give these projects a sense of supreme authority would make their adoption overdetermined. There is, by contrast, no norm that *requires* people to adopt artistic unifying projects. But, even if we weaken the claim, the result is still a bad one, from the view of Leiter's Nietzsche: higher types will be less likely to achieve their potential and flourish.

[56] As Leiter (2002) argues extensively, we can construct Nietzsche's target when he's critiquing morality by isolating a set of pro-and-con attitudes towards different values and norms that may be shared by some moral theories and traditions in Western culture and philosophy, but not necessarily by all. The collection of these attitudes Leiter calls "morality in the pejorative sense."

contemporary Western culture and doesn't, as a matter of fact, serve as a common consideration that people take seriously in their overall decision-making process.

There's a convincing response to this worry too, I'll argue, but it requires taking a step back and asking: what is this "morality" that Nietzsche finds so unappealing? Leiter's (1997, 2002) approach, as I noted, is to construct a list of norms and attitudes—e.g., a pro-attitude towards compassion and a con-attitude towards strength—that Nietzsche criticizes more generally (MPS). MPS is contrasted with a list of norms and attitudes that Nietzsche endorses, e.g., an appreciation for hierarchy, self-reverence, etc. (See, again, figure 1). This approach to Nietzsche's conception of morality, however, as Maudemarie Clark argues, "leaves it unclear whether Nietzsche's objections to MPS are actually objections to morality" (2015, 64). In ignoring the historical dimension of Nietzsche's account of morality, Leiter's approach risks obfuscating Nietzsche's critical target.[57] Thus, for instance, Clark suggests, "Although contemporary secular culture embraces happiness as a norm, it seems to be the antithesis of a moral culture" (ibid). Indeed, once we consider the historical dimension of Nietzsche's understanding of morality, it will become apparent that the devaluation of suffering—and the high estimation of happiness—are symptoms of morality's modern *decay* rather than the next stage in its development or one of its core features. First, let's consider Nietzsche's discussion of the ascetic ideal in the third treatise of the *Genealogy of Morality*. The ascetic ideal, at its core, is the evaluation that human existence is a mistake, an "error that one refutes through deeds—

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[57] For instance, in the preface of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche famously says we need a "critique" of moral values; a genealogy of morality is meant to facilitate such a critique. But Nietzsche's idea of a genealogy of *morality* would not be identical with a genealogy of "MPS." Leiter understands this, of course. He understandably avoids the messy question, "what is 'morality' for Nietzsche?" but, in doing so, we risk losing sight of how Nietzsche's critique of morality is directed at morality itself.

should refute" (GM III: §11). Consequently, the ascetic ideal elevates the life of self-denial as the best and most righteous kind of life one could lead on earth; and, in Nietzsche's view, morality is the ascetic ideal's interpretation of ethical life. Thus, in a formula: the best life = moral life = ascetic life. In the very last section of GM III, Nietzsche claims that

> suffering itself was *not* [man's] problem, rather that an answer was missing to the scream of his question: "*to what end* suffering?" Man, the bravest animal and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* negate suffering in itself; he *wants* it, he even seeks it out, provided one shows him a *meaning* for it, a *to-this-end* of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering itself, was the curse that thus far lay stretched out over humanity—*and the ascetic ideal offered it a meaning*! (GM III: §28; cf. GM II: §7).

The ascetic ideal, on Nietzsche's view, offered human beings a meaning to suffering through the mechanisms and concepts of morality. It enabled people to interpret suffering as "guilt" for past wrongs, as punishment from God for humanity's sinful nature. It provided mankind with something to *will*, with a goal: the overcoming of the world, the body, and its evil temptations—or "purity," in Williams' words (ELP 194). From this it should become clear that the ascetic ideal doesn't necessarily devalue suffering, but, in fact, presupposes and requires suffering as an ingredient of its own value. Under its interpretation, suffering becomes a mark of distinction, a condition that brings one closer to God or to morality's ideal and confirms the existence of a "moral world order" or "justice" or one's "superiority of soul." Morality's genius was precisely in making suffering a meaningful and desirable feature of human life. The ascetic interpretation of suffering "brought new suffering with it, deeper, more inward, more poisonous, gnawing more at life … But in spite of all this—man was *rescued* by it, he had a meaning, he was henceforth no longer like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense … now he could *will* something—no matter for the moment in what direction, to

what end, with what he willed: *the will itself was saved*' (GM III: §28). Morality without the *will to suffer*, then, is not really "morality" at all in Nietzsche's relevant historical sense (cf. HH I: §137, §141 in relation to Christian morality; D §18 and GM II: §3 in relation to the "morality of custom"). It is morality stripped of its most important innovation, its 'medicinal' qualities (GM III: §16, §17; cf. GS §345, GM P: §6). This of course doesn't mean that morality posits suffering as something that is worth pursuing independently of its relation to anything else; it's not posited as valuable in itself. Rather, the view is that suffering is willed as part of a project: morality's project of overcoming life, existence, or nature.[58]

Two problems follow:

1) What are we to make of popular moral theories that are explicitly hedonistic, like utilitarianism, that as a matter of principle take suffering to be intrinsically bad and, hence, undesirable, as something that ought to be minimized as much as possible?

2) Many moral norms seem to be explicitly directed at the promotion of happiness and the diminution of suffering—compassion, "help thy neighbor," etc.—and therefore seem to presuppose the badness of suffering and the goodness of happiness. Let's address these in turn, starting at the top.

If Nietzsche's critique of morality involves a critique of utilitarianism, then it seems like morality can't be so intimately connected to the "will to suffer," as I claimed. Perhaps one could argue then that utilitarianism isn't really part of morality, on Nietzsche's view? Perhaps, but this is unlikely. There's little doubt that utilitarianism, for Nietzsche, was a central member

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[58] Christopher Janaway has argued recently (2017) that suffering is neither good nor bad in itself for Nietzsche; suffering doesn't in itself give us a *reason* to avoid it, but it provides no independent reason to welcome it either. Reginster has also recently argued that the goal of the ascetic ideal isn't so much to alleviate suffering as it is to address the "second-order torment caused by the representation of [suffering] as without "meaning" or "purpose"" (2021, 167).

of morality's family tree. Yet, if we're correct in thinking that morality is deeply intertwined

with the ascetic ideal, this would strongly suggest that Nietzsche understood utilitarianism as

entangled, in some sense, with the ascetic ideal as well. But how could this be? In Jeremy

Bentham's foundational utilitarian text, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789),

he defines the "principle of asceticism" as the *opposing* principle to the one he endorses: the

principle of utility (PML II: §8). How could a moral philosophy that is explicitly defined against

asceticism itself be an expression of asceticism? There are, I submit, at least two possible ways

of connecting utilitarianism to the ascetic ideal. First, utilitarianism's more naturalistic

orientation denies to human beings the sort of dignity that Kantian ethics and Christianity had

historically endowed them with. In a sense, it threatens to erase the self-standing value of

agents entirely from its picture of ethical life (See especially Williams 1973; Rawls 1971, §5 and

§30). People don't matter in themselves, but only as vessels or containers or vectors of

pleasurable and painful states; or people matter but only as means to the minimization or

maximization of pleasure and pain in the universe.[59] Second, Nietzsche presciently foresaw, I

think, that utilitarianism tends towards an extremely self-denying form of demandingness. In

Twilight of the Idols, he comments about the "English":

> They have got rid of the Christian God, and now feel obliged to cling all the more firmly
> to Christian morality: that is English consistency … In England, in response to every
> little emancipation from theology one has to reassert one's position in a fear-inspiring
> manner as a moral fanatic. That is the *penance* one pays there (TI "Skirmishes" §5; cf. D
> §132).

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[59] In this sense, utilitarianism figures nicely into Nietzsche's claim that the Enlightenment tradition and modern
science are the heirs of the ascetic ideal: "Hasn't precisely the self-belittlement of man, his *will* to self-belittlement
been marching relentlessly forward since Copernicus? Alas, the belief in his dignity, uniqueness, irreplaceability
in the hierarchy of being is lost—he has become an *animal*, without simile, qualification, or reservation an animal,
he who in his earlier belief was almost god" (GM III: §25).

There is something indeed very ironic about the fact that an ostensibly naturalistic moral philosophy, which emphasizes happiness as its criterion of the good, is today commonly recognized amongst philosophers as *the most* demanding moral theory on offer. There are no limits imposed on the requirement to maximize the good. As a leading utilitarian philosopher of our own times suggests, at the very least those of us who are relatively well-off are morally required to be sacrificing much, much more of our time, income, and energy in an effort to promote the happiness and eliminate the suffering of those who are relatively much less well-off than ourselves.[60] And even if we manage to eliminate all the suffering and maximizing the pleasure of all living humans—an obviously impossible goal—we would *still* have innumerable moral obligations to maximize the happiness and minimize the pain of non-human animals and future generations.[61] The promotion of happiness is simply an endless task; one can always, and indeed must, simply do more. *That* is the fanatical "penance" one pays for removing morality's theological foundations. Therefore, although the ascetic ideal doesn't manifest overtly in utilitarian *theory*, it worms its way into utilitarian *practice*. This is reflected even in BGE 225, where Nietzsche criticizes moral theories that take pleasure and pain as the benchmark of value. His issue with these theories is that they want to "*abolish suffering*," but it's clear that it's the *moral* dimension of this abolition that primarily concerns him. These suffering-abolitionists aren't focused on their own suffering, but rather on the suffering of the least well-off: "the sick and unfortunate, with those addicted to vice and maimed from the start … [and] the grumbling, sorely pressed, rebellious slave strata who long for dominion"

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[60] Peter Singer (1972).

[61] See, for example, Alison Hills' "Utilitarianism, Contractualism, and Demandingness" (2010).

(cf. BGE §44, D §174). It's plausible, then, to read Nietzsche's concern as targeting not primarily the *judgment* that suffering is bad, but the *moral demand* that suffering be universally abolished.[62] Even Nietzsche's claim that, "[t]he sick are the greatest danger to the healthy" (GM III: §14) emphasizes that the 'healthy' should be prevented specifically from adopting the *task* of becoming "nurses or physicians." Nietzsche says, "the higher *must* not degrade itself into a tool of the lower … they [i.e., the healthy] alone have been *given responsibility* for the human future … but *in order for* them to do what only *they* should do, how could they be free to choose to be physician, comforter, "savior" for the sick?" (ibid). The implication is that they can't turn to their genuine task if they devote themselves to alleviating the suffering of others. So, the "moral" lineage in utilitarianism is not in its attitude towards suffering, but in the practical asceticism that it demands, in its demandingness. The ascetic ideal is still embedded within the kind of life and activity that utilitarianism prescribes.

Yet here's where we encounter our second problem. The moral demand to abolish suffering still evinces a negative attitude towards suffering. This, moreover, isn't unique to utilitarianism either, but rather seems to be part of many long-standing moral norms and values, e.g., compassion, mercy, charity, etc. Indeed, according to an influential interpretation of Nietzsche by Bernard Reginster, the condemnation of suffering as something evil in itself constitutes the very "core" of Nietzsche's conception of morality (2006, 162).[63] Consider, for

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[62] The same idea applies, I think, to Nietzsche's attack on compassion in A 7. The main problem with compassion is that it motivates altruistic behavior in cases where, on Nietzsche's view, such behavior leads to the preservation of the weak and suffering, i.e., that which *ought* to be overcome. The trouble, again, seems to be less focused on the judgment and more concerned with its practical dimension.

[63] Reginster acknowledges that Nietzsche attacks morality on other fronts, e.g., he attacks the moral commitment to egalitarianism, democracy, socialism, utility, hatred of instinct, etc., but according to Reginster, the common element all these targets share is their condemnation of suffering, or the avoidance of the "feeling of dissatisfied

instance, Nietzsche's description of slave morality in *Beyond Good and Evil*. As he explains, in slave morality

> those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored—for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence (BGE §260).

Assuming that slave morality is *morality*, i.e., Nietzsche's critical target, it therefore seems plausible to claim that the devaluation and condemnation of suffering are core features of morality for Nietzsche.

But, in my view, this conclusion is too quick. Specifically, we're neglecting here an important Nietzschean distinction between a "practice" and its "meaning." In Nietzsche's discussion of punishment in GM II, he writes, "one must distinguish in it [i.e., punishment] two sorts of things: first that which is relatively *permanent* in it, the practice, the act, the 'drama,' a certain sequence of procedures; on the other hand, that which is *fluid* in it, the meaning, the purpose, the expectation tied to the execution of such procedures" (GM II: §13). Therefore, although it's quite possible that the practices Nietzsche associates with slave morality were originally caused by and perhaps even aimed at the elimination of suffering, that doesn't yet tell us whether the intrinsic "badness" of suffering—and, hence, the imperative to eliminate it—are part of the (moralized) meaning of these practices.[64] The *moral* praise for compassion, patience, humility, etc. rides on interpreting them as instances of principled, voluntary self-

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longing or desire" (2006, 176).

[64] Nietzsche's claim, actually, is that the prototypes of these practices may have emerged from the "herd instinct," or to serve the interests and needs of the community (GS §116, §117). But Nietzsche is also clear that these practices, e.g., beneficence, reciprocity, and even compassion, can and did exist in a *pre-moral* form (BGE §201).

sacrifice, or as the exercising of resistance against one's 'anti-social' natural instincts, e.g., selfishness, egoism, cruelty, aggression, etc. (TI "Morality" §4; BGE §55; GM II: §18). Moral practices are not good *because* they tend to alleviate suffering, but because they're expressions of a good will (Kant) or a compassionate insight (Schopenhauer); it's a matter of one's commitment to upholding moral principles over the promotion of one's own happiness or welfare or interests. And, from the moral point of view, the degree of your freely-performed self-sacrifice—your self-inflicted suffering—becomes proportional to the degree of your moral worth, such that, at the top of the ladder you'll find the greatest degree of self-sacrificial suffering coupled with absolute moral perfection, i.e., Christ on the cross. It's true that salvation and, hence, happiness are guaranteed for those who are morally good, but happiness is not a properly moral motivation. The moral man is not motivated by happiness, but by justice, or duty, or doing God's will (BGE §60), or the good-in-itself. The success of his actions doesn't matter so long as the maxim that underlies and is expressed through those actions is 'pure.' In sum, moral practices that aim at the reduction of suffering in others do not thereby condemn suffering as "evil" in itself. Rather, the moral value of these practices depends more on the suffering of the *doer* or on the extent to which the agent is willing to harm herself. That is the kind of meaning we'd expect to find once ethical practices are moralized via the ascetic ideal; and it's not at all what we'd expect to find if morality was committed at its core to the devaluation of suffering as such.

The virtue of humility serves as an instructive example here. In *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller (1997) discusses humility in medieval Europe and notes a peculiar "paradox" that arises from its practice:

Humility is a virtue that can't work its way out of a psychological paradox it always finds itself in. If the granting of rewards is based on how humble you are, then you find yourself in a system in which the attainment of humility provides the means for being looked up to by others and thus for knowing yourself superior to those who are looking up to you. You become proud of your humility and enjoy the payoff of winning the humility contest … The quest for humility, however, eventually led [in Medieval Europe] to an escalating competition for greater humility because an easy humility was inevitably suspect as not being enough of a test of virtue … The quest for humility, the struggle to show oneself with absolutely no pride in one's wealth, beauty, rank, made for some strange behaviors and perverse incentives (1997, 157-58).

The "strange" behavior prompted by this "quest" for humility—for appearing ever more virtuous than the other—that Miller has in mind is exemplified by Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380 CE). Saint Catherine is remembered (today) for engaging in a variety of ascetic practices: extreme fasting, self-flagellation, etc. But one episode, reported by Catherine's confessor, Raymond of Capua, is especially notable for our purposes. Catherine was taking care of an elderly nun who had developed a cancerous sore on her breast. The sore produced such a foul smell that no one other than Catherine was willing to treat the elderly woman. One day, "when she [Catherine] was about to open the sore to dress it there came out such an horrible stench, that she could hardly bear it, but that she must needs vomit" (quoted in Miller 1997, 158). Catherine, though, was appalled by her own response to the woman, and determined to overcome her natural aversion, she "bowed down and held her mouth and nose over the sore so long until at the length it seemed that she had comforted her stomach and quite overcome the squeamishness she felt before" (ibid). Catherine *did* vomit while taking care of the elderly nun at another time, though, but now, Raymond reports, "[Catherine] took all the washing of the sore, together with the corrupt matter and filth; and going aside put it all into a cup, and drank it up lustily. And in doing so, she overcame at one time, both the squeamishness of her own stomach and malice of the devil" (quoted in Miller 1997, 158-59).

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Miller explains this grotesque, self-effacing behavior as "the ratcheting up, in the manner of an arms race, of the moves in the competition for humility" (159). The point is that the *moral* value of Catherine's actions is tied to the extremity of her willingness to engage in self-debasement, not to their conduciveness to reducing the suffering of the nun. Indeed, her actions didn't alleviate the nun's suffering at all. Raymond of Capua reports that the nun begged Catherine to stop and eventually developed "rank hatred" towards her.[65]

None of this is to deny that Nietzsche was worried about the dominance of "herd morality" in modernity (BGE §202). The devaluation suffering and promotion of an ignoble, 'green-pasture,' bovine happiness does seem to be closely intertwined with herd morality (BGE §202; cf. BGE §44). But, as I see it, "herd morality" is a symptom of morality's *decline*, not of its triumph (WP §240); it is whatever is left once morality turns on itself—via the ascetic ideal—and slowly sheds and destroys those features that made it attractive to humans in the first place, e.g., providing a justification for suffering (BGE §61, BGE §55). The result of the process, to cite Clark again, is that "Morality is now reduced to 'herd animal morality,' based largely on prudence and conformity. The reign of the 'last man' threatens because we now lack any ideal that could inspire us to care about much beyond our own happiness" (2015, 73).[66]

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[65] Reginster's (2006) view encounters some other problems, too. Simon May (2011) argues that, if Nietzsche's critique of morality was its attitude towards suffering—its condemnation of suffering as being intrinsically bad—then there's a sense in which Nietzsche himself is still in the "morality game," even if one agrees with Reginster's reading of Nietzsche's positive ethics and the will to power. Nietzsche's attempt to reevaluate the value of suffering, according to May, still evinces a *need* to overcome suffering and, hence, still treats suffering as a problem. In my view, though, I think that May's criticism dissipates, if we simply deny the claim that morality devalues suffering or condemns it as 'intrinsically' bad.

[66] I suggest it's also important to distinguish between *herd morality* (BGE §202) and *herd instinct* (GS §116). The latter is something that's part of our Darwinian biological inheritance, and it's not special to any specific kind of human being. The warrior nobles of GM I have a "herd instinct" too. Nietzsche is clear in GS §116 that the herd instinct is responsive to the needs of a community. But different communities have very different needs. The herd instinct, in that sense, can prompt one to engage in many different activities and adopt different evaluations, including ones we'd recognize as "warriorlike." It is fundamentally about *conformity* to social standards. Herd

Nietzsche famously prophesies the coming of the "last man" in *Zarathustra's* Prologue:

> Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the last man.
>   "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the last man, and he blinks.
>   The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small ....
>   "We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth.
>   ....
>   No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.
>   "Formerly, all the world was mad," say the most refined, and they blink.
>   One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened: so there is no end of derision. One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled--else it might spoil the digestion. (Z Prologue: 5)

The real horror of Nietzsche's last man—who is preoccupied with his personal comfort, security, and pleasure above all else—is not that he's the perfect embodiment of moral values, he manifestly isn't, but that he seems to lack any substantive values and any recognizably human ideals at all. There's nothing for him to suffer *for*; in other words, he's a man without a "will" (GM III: §28). He doesn't even will nothingness, he *is* nothingness. Therefore, if the condemnation of suffering and the overvaluation of happiness are a threat to the higher types, as Leiter claims, it is a threat that comes in the wake of morality's demise, not from one's commitment to the content of moral values themselves or from their presence in moral culture.[67] Herd values are the *detritus* of morality; the moral man (despite his flaws) was still

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morality, conversely, is not merely about the preservation of a certain community; it has its own special content, e.g., pleasure-seeking, comfort, peace, etc.

[67] But, morality, according to Nietzsche, is to blame for its own decline. It undercuts its own authority through the attachment of unconditional value to truth (GS §344, GS §357, GM III: §27). Thus, there is a sense in which morality is responsible for the looming threat of the "last man," and Nietzsche is of course critical of this (GM

able to "despise" himself, to conceive of "love" and "creation," to long for something beyond himself.[68]

In sum, the claim I am making is that morality, viewed within its historical context, does not condemn suffering. It actually evinces (albeit sometimes covertly) a pro-attitude towards it. This doesn't mean that Nietzsche isn't critical of contemporary culture's attitudes towards suffering. It means that Nietzsche's primary problem with *morality* is not its attitude—whether pro or con—towards suffering. Rather, his problem is with the *meaning* that morality imposes on suffering. The achievement of morality's ideal always involves some kind of suffering, then, whether it's through the mechanism of guilt, self-sacrifice, or 'good works;' and the critical question is whether the meaning morality gives to this suffering can command the allegiance and inspiration of the "higher types" and entice them to adopt morality's ideal as their own, thereby driving them away from realizing their own potentials and achieving Nietzsche's "higher" goals. But this it cannot do, I have argued, unless morality's ideal is construed (with Williams) as a *demanding* one. Therefore, if Leiter is right to claim that an overly-demanding notion of moral obligation is neither (a) an issue that is alive in contemporary moral culture nor (b) an object of Nietzsche's normative critique of morality,

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P: §6), but this is still quite different than Leiter's construal of Nietzsche's criticism of morality.

[68] This transitional stage from the demise of morality to the emergence of the last man is captured disturbingly well in Mark Fisher's portrait of his 21st-century students in England: "Many of the teenage students I encountered seemed to be in a state of what I would call depressive hedonia. Depression is usually characterized as a state of anhedonia, but the condition I'm referring to is constituted not by an inability to get pleasure so much as by an inability to do anything else *except* pursue pleasure. There is a sense that 'something is missing' – but no appreciation that this mysterious, missing enjoyment can only be accessed *beyond* the pleasure principle" (2009, 21-22), and "Students are aware that if they don't attend for weeks on end, and/or if they don't produce any work, they will not face any meaningful sanction. They typically respond to this freedom not by pursuing projects but by falling into hedonic (or anhedonic) lassitude: the soft narcosis, the comfort food oblivion of PlayStation, all-night TV and marijuana" (2009, 23).

then *his own account of Nietzsche's critique becomes compromised*. Williams, in that case, may actually provide a crucial missing piece in Leiter's own interpretation of Nietzsche.[69]

2.3. Moral Obligations or Moral Ideals?

There is one final (but important) objection that could be raised on Leiter's behalf, however. It could be argued that the notion of "demandingness" here isn't moral demandingness in Williams' sense. There is an important distinction, which we've yet to address, between the demandingness of moral *obligations*, on the one hand, and the demandingness of moral *ideals*, on the other. Williams' conception of demandingness pertains to moral obligation; it's about what morality requires us to do, and, indeed, what we can legitimately require of *each other* to do or refrain from doing. In response, it could be said that no one is required to aspire to moral sainthood or self-sacrificial heroic martyrdom, and it would be unreasonable to hold someone responsible for not being or aspiring to become a saint or a hero. For commonsense morality, sainthood and heroism would be morally good, but not obligatory: it is supererogatory (Urmson 1969).[70] Leiter might say, then, that Nietzsche's problem is with the demandingness of the supererogatory ideals of morality, not with morality's conception of moral obligation or particular obligations that issue from it. Nietzsche's critique aims primarily at ensuring that the higher types don't adopt these corrosive moral ideals which will stifle their

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[69] I am also rejecting Simon Robertson's (2011) claim that making morality *less* demanding wouldn't do away with Nietzsche's critique of morality as stifling excellence. I'm arguing that Nietzsche's critique is deflated if morality isn't construed as highly demanding. This doesn't mean Nietzsche would find an undemanding morality unobjectionable. Perhaps he'd critique it for enshrining slavish ideals, as Huddleston suggests (2019), even if those ideals are not ultimately detrimental to his "higher types."

[70] This is also raised as an argument against Williams' objection to the demandingness of moral obligation (see Darwall 1987).

potential—and, surely, attempting to live the lives of saints or self-sacrificial heroes would pose such a threat—but not with liberating them from the ordinary obligations of morality. The problem, namely, is with the demandingness of moral ideals rather than the demandingness of supposedly excessive moral obligations. It would therefore be sufficient for Nietzsche if he could show that moral ideals are hollow, repulsive, fallacious, etc., which he, of course, does throughout his work (HH I: §137, §141; GS §335; GM I: §14), in order to destroy their aura of greatness and, hence, their attractiveness for higher types. He doesn't need to concern himself with moral obligation in addition, though he does of course reject moral obligation as a piece of nonsense too.

I offer two all-too-brief responses to this crucial objection. First, even if it is correct, the objection manages to distance Nietzsche from Williams only at the cost of launching him into the orbit of other "morality critics," namely, morality critics who harp precisely on the demandingness of moral ideals, like Susan Wolf and her critique of "moral saints" (1982). This is something Leiter (especially 1997) wouldn't seem to welcome. Morality's demandingness, in that case, would remain highly relevant to Nietzsche's critique of morality, though not exactly in the sense Williams worried about. But, second, it's not clear that the objection is in fact correct. There is little evidence Nietzsche recognized the supererogatory as an operative moral category.[71] Unconditional duty, however, is of course much more central to his conception of morality (see, for example, A §11; BGE §46, §187, §250; GS §5, §335, §345; D §9, §207; WS §44). More importantly, though, deontological terminology is present even in Nietzsche's

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[71] But see AOM §300: "In the case of all things intended to endure and demanding the service of many people much that is *less good* has to be made the *rule*, even though the organizer is very well aware of what is better and more difficult: but he will calculate on there never being any lack of people *able* to be adequate to the rule."

discussion of morality's ideals. Consider, again, Nietzsche's discussion of the ascetic ideal, which surely counts as both a (if not *the*) moral ideal and an excessively demanding one. The discussion is couched in unmistakably deontic language: "The ascetic treats life as a wrong path that one must finally retrace back to the point where it begins; or as an error that one refutes through deeds—*should* refute: for he *demands* that one go along with him; where he can, he forces *his* valuation of existence" (GM III: 10). The ascetic ideal is an ideal, but it's not presented as an optional one; the ascetic priest does not recommend it to human beings, he demands that they adopt, pursue, and obey it. It is presented as a normatively authoritative injunction, a categorical imperative, and not as a prudential or hypothetical one, for humanity itself.[72] Indeed, it would make little sense for ascetic priests not to treat the ascetic ideal as categorical and universal—for one, they're too 'unwarlike' to *force* it on *everyone*, and they're interested in making the ideal (and, through it, their power) completely immune to all possible criticism (D P: §3; WS §43). It's not clear, therefore, that Nietzsche distinguished between the demandingness of moral ideals and the demandingness of moral obligations. His view, rather, seems to have been that morality's ideal is itself also morally obligatory.[73] In this sense, he's not entirely distinct from Kant: the categorical imperative is interpretable as an expression of

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[72] Simon Robertson (2012) argues that categoricity is a crucial element in Nietzsche's conception of morality. For Robertson, moreover, if morality is not presented as normatively authoritative, i.e., as independent of people's desires, inclinations, etc., then it's hard to see why morality would pose such a problem for the higher types, as Leiter wants to argue. He writes that morality's "normative authority … explains how morality constrains … higher individuals: they cannot escape morality and are required to comply with it" (2012, 99). And "In fact it may be doubted whether Nietzsche's critique makes adequate sense without this. For if morality were not presented and accepted as authoritative and thus non-optional, nascent higher types would not be or feel subject to, and constrained by, it" (2012, 100).

[73] See also HH I: §141, where Nietzsche writes, "Go through the moral demands exhibited in the documents of Christianity one by one and you will find that in every case they are exaggerated, so that man *could* not live up to them; the intention is not that he should *become* more moral, but he should feel *as sinful as possible"* (cf. D §87, HH I: §137).

a prescription *and* as expressing an ideal; I am required to act only on those maxims that can be willed as universal laws, but also, in acting on such maxims, I am manifesting the ideal of rational autonomy as well.[74]

3. The Nietzsche-Williams Schism

Thus far I have only shown that, if one assumes (with Leiter) that Nietzsche's objection to morality is that it stifles the potential of higher types, then it's much more philosophically reasonable to assume that he attributed to morality—and, by proxy, moral culture—the kind of demandingness that Bernard Williams addressed in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. This, however, leaves several issues open: (a) it doesn't show that Nietzsche was *in fact* concerned with moral demandingness; (b) nor does it show that moral demandingness is a serious issue in contemporary moral culture; and, finally, (c) the argument doesn't quite yet show that Leiter's interpretation of the schism between Williams and Nietzsche is wrong. It could be argued, on Leiter's behalf, that the schism between Williams and Nietzsche doesn't consist in their opposition to moral demandingness, but rather, the *reasons* for their opposition. Leiter's Nietzsche opposes it because it's a threat to the flourishing of the higher types. Yet Williams, on Leiter's view, opposes it because it's a threat to the comforts and pleasantries of modern, bourgeois life, i.e., the kind of life that the *last man* would find satisfying but that Nietzsche

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[74] See David Velleman (2005, 131) and chapter 6 for an interpretation of Kant along these lines. Velleman reads Kant through the lens of Freud. For Freud, the Categorical Imperative is "direct heir of the Oedipus Complex" (quoted in Velleman 2005, 130). The child internalizes parental authority—which comes to constitute the superego—in two senses: (a) as punishers to be feared and obeyed; and (b) as exemplars to be loved and admired. See Sandler, Holder, and Meers' "The Ego Ideal and the Ideal Self" (1963) for an article that details the developments in Freud's own theorizing about the ego ideal.

would find nauseating. That is the real schism between Williams and Nietzsche—while they're united in their opposition to morality's demandingness, they're at odds in the reasons and ends for that opposition. So, Leiter could in principle accept the argument I have provided that Nietzsche was concerned with moral demandingness and its place in moral culture without conceding his major conclusion about the philosophical difference between Nietzsche and Williams.

I will argue that that there is an important difference between Nietzsche and Williams' critique of morality's demandingness, but it's not the one Leiter adduces. Yet, we will only be in a position to appreciate this difference after we reconstruct Nietzsche's own account of moral demandingness. This is the task to which we'll turn in the following two chapters. There are several difficulties to reconstructing Nietzsche's conception of moral demandingness, though. There is the fact that his views in general changed and evolved over time—between *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Antichrist* there are numerous developments—and he's not always clear about *how* his views have changed. He requires, of course, careful reading and scrutiny (GM P: §8; D P: §3). I will mostly focus on Nietzsche's *Genealogy* in articulating his conception of moral demandingness, although I'll make references to middle and early period works when relevant.

Chapter 3

The Genealogy of Moral Demandingness

The Second Treatise of the *Genealogy of Morality* has raised many puzzles for its readers. It is certainly one of Nietzsche's most challenging texts. But it is, I think, *the* text one must consult if one seeks to understand Nietzsche's views about the source and nature of moral demandingness. This chapter argues that a close reading of the Second Treatise, *"Guilt," "Bad Conscience," and Related Matters*, reveals that Nietzsche—much like Williams—considered morality's conception of obligation to be exceedingly demanding. This revelation, I'll show, emerges once we reconstruct Nietzsche's genealogy of moral demandingness: how the concept of obligation acquired its demandingness. The primary aim here is, then, to present how demandingness fits into Nietzsche's genealogical account of morality. Nietzsche's genealogy of moral demandingness relies on two genealogical 'strands' that, only when taken together, constitute a satisfactory explanation for the emergence of moral demandingness. The first

strand traces the origin of moral demandingness to contractual (non-moral) obligations between "debtors" and "creditors." I'll call this the *Debtor-Creditor Strand* (DCS). If we follow DCS alone it seems to suggest that the demandingness of moral obligation emerges over time from an ever-increasing debt—an obligation of repayment—to ancestral deities (GM II: §19). This religious debt becomes 'infinite' whenever the "maximum" God of Christianity enters the historical scene (GM II: §20). But as Nietzsche makes clear, DCS is incomplete, even misleading, as an account of the genealogy of moral demandingness, *as long as* it doesn't incorporate the second genealogical strand: "bad conscience" (GM II: §21). According to the proto-Freudian *Bad Conscience Strand* (BCS), the demandingness of morality results from the "internalization" of aggressive drives such that these drives are discharged against the self rather than against others. Although the internalization of aggressive drives is plausibly understood as a precondition for social existence in general, BCS suggests that demandingness results when the internalization of the drives (bad conscience) occurs under explicitly *non-contractual* social arrangement; moral demandingness develops amongst oppressed peoples within a rigidly hierarchical society, i.e., the kind of historical context out of which Christianity grew. The aggressive drives discharge themselves in the feeling of *guilt*, Nietzsche claims. But, because guilt doesn't occur without the (assumed) violation of an obligation, that means some elements of DCS must be included here as well. As we'll see, Nietzsche's full account suggests that the aggressive drives fasten onto the concept of obligation because of its connection to *punishment*. For punishment *qua* guilt to satisfy the aggressive drives, the concept of obligation must itself undergo a transformation in both its content and form, however. It must become exceedingly demanding; and this happens when obligation is interpreted via the ascetic ideal.

In Section 1, I reconstruct DCS and raise the problem of its incompleteness. In section 2, I reconstruct BCS and suggest how it should be reconciled with DCS to form Nietzsche's complete narrative of the genealogy of moral demandingness. In section 3, I'll briefly suggest how Nietzsche's framework reveals the contemporary 'hideouts' of demandingness in moral culture, a topic to which I'll return in the next chapter. Likewise, although Nietzsche claims that the knowledge provided by the genealogy of morality is needed for its "*critique*" (GM P: §5), Nietzsche's "reevaluation" of demandingness will be considered only in Chapter 4.[75]

1. The Debtor-Creditor Strand

How did obligation originate, on Nietzsche's view? In GM II: §8, Nietzsche claims that, "The feeling of guilt, of personal obligation … had its origin in the oldest and most primitive relationship among persons there is, in the relationship between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor."[76] Nietzsche offers an etymological clue—that *Schuld* means both "guilt" and "debt" in German—as the basis for this claim. The domain of *contractual relations* is, he claims, the space where we should locate the origin of all the interrelated concepts of "guilt," "conscience," "obligation," "duty," "right," etc. (GM II: §6). What is the debtor-creditor relationship, though? Nietzsche describes three different modes that the debtor-creditor relationship can take: (1) *interpersonal*; (2) *communal*; and (3) *religious*. Let's examine each.

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[75] There is an ongoing debate about the relation between genealogy and critique. For some representative contributions see Geuss (1999), Leiter (2002), Katsafanas (2011), and Reginster (2021).

[76] Simon May (1999, 59) has claimed that Nietzsche's equivalency between guilt and obligation in this passage can't be right. Guilt is the emotional, self-reflexive response to one's violation of a recognized, authoritative obligation. It might be more charitable to read Nietzsche as suggesting that both concepts originated in the debtor-creditor relationship, not that they're identical.

The interpersonal mode is the "oldest" one (GM II: §8). The paradigm case of the interpersonal mode is a contract between two parties, one who provides a good, service, or loan to another on the condition that the other promises to repay him later; the two transform into creditor and debtor: one who owes and one who is owed. Thus, "debt" was originally nothing more than *an obligation of repayment*.[77] "Obligation," in this sense, means both parties recognize that the creditor has a reasonable *expectation* that he'll be repaid by the debtor and a corresponding *right* to exact repayment if he's not, e.g., by "punishment."[78] This economic relationship is so fundamental, Nietzsche says, that it precedes any complex social formation:

> No degree of civilization … has yet been discovered in which something of this relationship is not already noticeable. Making prices, gauging values, thinking out equivalents, exchanging—this preoccupied man's very first thinking to such an extent that it is in a certain sense thinking *itself*: here the oldest kind of acumen was bred, here likewise we may suspect the first beginnings of human pride, man's feeling of preeminence with respect to other creatures … [M]an designated himself as the being who measures values, who values and measures … Purchase and sale, together with their psychological accessories, are older than even the beginnings of any societal associations and organizational forms (GM II: §8).

But, at some point, Nietzsche says,

> It was out of the most rudimentary form of personal legal rights that the budding feeling of exchange, contract, guilt, right, obligation, compensation first *transferred* itself onto the coarsest and earliest communal complexes (in their relationship to similar complexes), together with the habit of comparing, measuring, and calculating power against power (GM II: §8).

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[77] This might seem strange, if the word for "debt" is also the word for "guilt" in German. But it's not so odd if we recognize that there's a constitutive connection between guilt and obligation. Guilt, paradigmatically, is the painful self-reflexive feeling that arises from one's recognition that a (moral) obligation, which one endorses, has been violated by oneself. (There are non-paradigmatic cases too, of course, like the ex-Catholic who feels guilty about sex. See Wallace 1994). One reason GM II has caused confusion perhaps is because the triadic connection between debt, obligation, and guilt has often remained obscure.

[78] Although, note Nietzsche's famous discussion of punishment in GM II: §13.

In other words, the model offered by interpersonal contractual relationships comes to govern communal life. Does this mean interpersonal contractual relations chronologically precede communal life as such? That, I think, can't be right. First, how would interpersonal contracts be enforced if they're not anchored in a communal and institutional context? Second, Nietzsche's claim that the capacity that's needed to enter a contract—i.e., to be *permitted to promise*—emerges only through *socialization* (GM II: §2). It's flatly contradictory to claim that interpersonal contracts precede the very condition that makes them possible. Third, Nietzsche does sometimes seem to recognize a pre-contractual phase of communal life and human development that was primarily governed through the "herd instinct" and organized in accordance to kinship relations (GS §354; cf. Snelson 2019). If we examine the passage from GM II: §8 closely, we can see that Nietzsche's claim is that the contractual mode of communal life is first "*transferred*" onto the relationship *between* "communal complexes." For these reasons, I think it's most charitable not to read Nietzsche as claiming interpersonal contracts precede communal life as such.

But then how should we read Nietzsche's claim that the "form of personal" contract becomes "*transferred*" onto the most ancient form of community? I propose that Nietzsche's claim is that the relationship between the community and its members increasingly comes to function as a contractual relationship: the community is the 'creditor,' and the community's members are the 'debtors.' It's absolutely crucial to clarify that, unlike in the interpersonal case, Nietzsche isn't talking about a *literal* contract. The relationship between the members and the community is best understood or conceptualized as functioning in terms of the creditor-debtor relation, but that doesn't mean that people think of it explicitly in those terms or conceive of

themselves as entering a literal contractual relation with the community.[79]

What are the communal 'contract's' terms, though? Nietzsche explains,

> One lives in a community, one enjoys the advantages of a community (oh what advantages! we sometimes underestimate this today), one lives protected, shielded, in peace and trust, free from care with regard to certain injuries and hostilities to which the human *outside*, the "outlaw" is exposed … since one has pledged and obligated oneself to the community precisely in view of these injuries and hostilities (GM II: §9).

The community provides the individual with certain goods, e.g., protection and cooperative ventures, on the condition that the individual obligates himself to the community. This is vague—what exactly are the "obligations" one must commit to uphold or recognize in order to be and remain a good-standing member of the community? A helpful clue comes from GM II: §3, where Nietzsche discusses the horrific forms of "old German punishments": "stoning … breaking on the wheel … casting stakes, having torn or trampled by horses ("quartering"), boiling the criminal in oil or wine … the popular flaying … cutting flesh from the breast; also, no doubt, that the evil-doer was smeared with honey and abandoned to the flies under a burning sun." The function of such brutal punishments, Nietzsche claims, was to ensure that the individual retains "in memory five, six "I will nots," in connection with which one has given one's *promise* in order to live within the advantages of society" (GM II: §3). The basic form of *communal obligation*, then, corresponds to "a few primitive requirements of social co-existence" (ibid). Although Nietzsche doesn't specify, it is assumed that these requirements primarily include negative obligations ("I will nots") such as, "Do not kill fellow members."

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[79] There is a real circularity problem lurking in the background here, though. It seems that Nietzsche is using the interpersonal conception of contract relations to explain communal relations, but it seems like without the communal contractual relations, interpersonal contractual relations wouldn't be possible at all. To obey the communal contract one must already be "permitted to promise," yet it's the communal contract that creates the possibility of being permitted to promise. See Avery Snelson (2019) and Simon May (1999, chapter 4).

But they could just as easily include positive obligations too, e.g., "fight to protect the community," "offer help to others during an emergency," etc.

Communal obligations and interpersonal contractual relations are both fundamentally aimed at securing reliability via formulating and setting reasonable expectations about each other's behavior, to employ Williams' vocabulary (1985, 187). Still, there are substantial differences between communal obligations and interpersonal contracts. In the communal case, we find ourselves on somewhat more familiar ethical grounds. First, the content of communal obligations is plainly more circumscribed than that of interpersonal contracts. The content of interpersonal contractual obligations is determined by the terms of the contract itself: I promised to give Joe $100 if he'd build me a chair, so I'm obligated to pay him $100 once he renders his service. The content always depends on the terms of the contract in question; but the contract can be about almost anything. In the communal case, the content (as we noted) corresponds to the *basic needs of communal co-existence*, and it is reasonable to assume there's some uniformity in this domain. For instance, communities cannot survive or thrive without an expectation that the members will refrain from robbing and murdering and assaulting each other. That is why we can assume "thou shalt not murder" will be an ethical obligation that the members of *any* remotely self-sustaining community will generally recognize towards each other.

Second, communal obligations are more general in scope than interpersonal ones. To illustrate this, consider an example. Suppose there is a general obligation to show good will to all the members of one's community. The scope of this obligation is general in the following senses: (a) the range of individuals who are *bound* by it; it is an obligation that *all* the members are bound by, rather than anyone in particular; and (b) the range of people who are the

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obligation's *object*. I am obligated to show good will to all the members, rather than to anyone in particular. In addition, because communal obligations are addressed to the community's members generally rather than particularly, their content is more abstract and untethered from everyday affairs even though they underpin everyday affairs as a condition for their persistence and stability. For instance, there is no need to remind people that they aren't allowed to kill each other during dinnertime. It simply follows from the shared acceptance of a broad, abstract, internalized norm against killing one's fellows in general. Communal obligations are thus transformed into or attain a status akin to ethical principles or duties: "indelible, omnipresent, unforgettable … "fixed ideas"" (GM II: §3).[80]

Third, communal obligations have a kind of temporal permanence that interpersonal obligations typically lack. The assumption is that interpersonal contracts, in paradigm cases, are supposed to come to a natural end. The creditor wouldn't give out a loan, if she didn't assume the debtor would repay it at *some* point in her lifetime in *some* way. Communal "debts," however, are constantly incurred and must be constantly 'repaid' via one's obedience. There is no point in time over the course of an individual's life at which the contractual communal relationship is expected to conclude. It is a permanent, ongoing affair.

Do the features I have attributed to communal obligations make these obligations demanding? Nietzsche suggests that the compliance mechanism of primitive communities was brutal, as his list of "old German punishments" insinuates, but he doesn't indicate that compliance itself was especially demanding. The "training" process might have involved a lot

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[80] See also WS §43. Nietzsche writes, "Duty is a compulsive feeling which impels us to some action and which we call good and regard as undiscussable (– we refuse to speak of its origin, limitation and justification or to hear them spoken of)."

"pain," he claims (GM II: §3), but it couldn't have been terribly difficult to uphold these demands once they're internalized ("retained in memory"). Furthermore, if communities are formed and maintained for purposes of basic mutual advantage (survival), then we would expect them to impose relatively modest demands on members rather than extreme ones.[81] Nietzsche echoes an argument of this sort in an earlier work: "In the case of all things intended to endure and demanding the service of many people much that is *less good* has to be made the *rule*, even though the organizer is very well aware of what is better and more difficult: but he will calculate on there never being any lack of people *able* to be adequate to the rule" (AOM §300).[82]

But the dynamic of the communal creditor-debtor relationship seems to acquire a different and ultimately much more demanding character once the third—*religious*—mode of contractual relations is introduced. Nietzsche claims that, although the community is a creditor in relation to its individual members, it is a perpetual debtor in relation to its original founders, the "ancestors":

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[81] This is not to say that communal obligations can't *become* demanding under certain circumstances. For instance, there might be an obligation to protect the community even at the cost of one's own life. But unless there's a perpetual and active state of warfare, then this kind of obligation wouldn't (in effect) be very demanding on people's day-to-day existence. Still, communal obligation can be very demanding even under ordinary circumstances, e.g., if they'd ensure a higher level of wellbeing for the community as a whole than people would have on their own. The important claim, though, is that communal obligations aren't essentially demanding and that, if they are geared towards communal *preservation* more so than communal flourishing, they'll tend towards moderation rather than extremity.

[82] This argument is also commonly offered by utilitarians against early versions of the demandingness objection. Sidgwick famously argued that the utilitarian doctrine should be wielded and known only by a select cadre of rulers; it would be disastrous, he claimed, if it became the commonsense of the "vulgar" (ME 4.5.3). Williams (1985, ELP 109) famously called this "Government House Utilitarianism." One might be tempted to suggest to scholars who interpret Nietzsche's mature view as advocating for a *political* aristocracy that they refer to this view as "*Government House Perfectionism*." This would seem an apt description, perhaps, for the failed state that was founded by the early 20th century fascist Italian poet—and, incidentally, also an admirer of Nietzsche—Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1919, the Italian Regency of Carnaro, which collapsed within a year.

> The civil-law relationship of the debtor to his creditor … was once again … interpreted into a relationship in which it is for us modern humans perhaps at its most incomprehensible: namely the relationship of *those presently living* to their *ancestors*. Within the original clan association—we are speaking of primeval times—the living generation always acknowledges a juridical obligation to the earlier generation, and particularly to the earliest one, which founded the clan (and by no mean a mere sentimental obligation: one might with good reason even deny the latter altogether for the longest part of the existence of the human race). Here the conviction holds sway that it is only through the sacrifices and achievements of the ancestors that the clan *exists* at all,—and that one has to *repay* them through sacrifices and achievements: one thereby acknowledges a *debt* that is continually growing, since these ancestors, in their continued existence as powerful spirits, do not cease to use their strength to bestow on the clan new benefits and advances. For nothing perhaps? But to those brutal and "soul-poor" ages there is no "for nothing." What can one give back to them? Sacrifices (initially only nourishment, in the coarsest sense), festivals, shrines, tributes, above all obedience—for all customs, as works of the ancestors, are also their statutes and commands (GM II: §19).

The contractual[83] relation between the (present) community and its founding fathers and mothers is characterized, then, not merely by the members' *owing* the ancestors for the foundation of the tribe—and, hence, its existence—but also for everything that the tribe has accomplished.[84] Unlike the obligation to obey the baseline rules for social coexistence, the obligation incurred here is "continually growing." So, Nietzsche continues

> —: does one ever give them [the ancestors] enough? This suspicion remains and grows … The fear of the progenitor and his power, the consciousness of debts toward him necessarily increases, according to this kind of logic, to exactly the same degree that the power of the clan itself increases, that the clan itself stands ever more victorious, independent, honored, feared … If one imagined this brutal kind of logic carried through to its end: finally, through the imagination of growing fear the progenitors of the *most powerful* clans must have grown into enormous proportions and have been

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[83] Again, we shouldn't read Nietzsche as claiming that the relationship between ancestors and the community is understood as a literal contract, but just that it can be understood in the functional terms of a contract. Although, in the Jewish case, there is a literal contract between Abraham and God (Genesis: 17). That may be a case where the implicit relation finally becomes explicit.

[84] It is possible that Nietzsche discovered the theory of ancestor worship from reading (or reading about) Herbert Spencer, who developed the theory in his *Principles of Sociology* (1876). Spencer claimed that all religions originate in ancestor worship. This is still debated today. See, e.g., Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996); and Peoples, Duda, and Marlowe (2016).

pushed back into the darkness of divine uncanniness and unimaginability:—in the end the progenitor is necessarily transfigured into a *god* (GM II: §19).

The ancestors are transformed into gods as the tribe's power grows. The success of the tribe cannot be due to the derisory powers of mere mortals; it must have necessitated miraculous, superhuman capacities. This culminates, Nietzsche claims, in the rise of monotheism, or with "the Christian god as the maximum god" (GM II: §20). From the most powerful tribes comes the idea of the most powerful God. The debt one owes to such a God, though, is equally a *maximal* debt. In short, Nietzsche's idea is that debt to the ancestral gods becomes an *infinite* debt to God, the "maximal" ancestor whose power is beyond all measure. This, in turn, implies that the obligation for repayment also becomes infinite. Yet how could a finite creature repay an infinite debt? Plainly, it cannot. Thus, we have finally arrived at an exceedingly, absurdly, impossibly demanding kind of obligation, an obligation that literally demands the impossible.

Note the contrast here with communal obligations. Although communal obligations are general and permanent (if one remains a good-standing member of the community), they neither *constantly accumulate* nor *increase in their stringency*.[85] Religious obligations, conversely, are both constantly accumulating and increasing in stringency as long as the community's power intensifies.[86] As tribal power increases so does the depth and breadth of the tribe's religious

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[85] Note, though, that Nietzsche claims in GM II: §10 that, as the community becomes more powerful, it is more prone to act with "mercy" towards transgressors as well. That is, it becomes less harsh in its demands and their enforcement. This, I think, should lead us to think that Nietzsche is *misleading* us in GM II: §19. The reason that Christianity develops as it does is due to factors that go beyond the creditor-debtor relationship itself. I explore this additional factor—bad conscience—below.

[86] Curiously, Nietzsche claims that the opposite happens if the community's power begins to wane. The belief in the ancestor-gods and their power becomes questioned and thus tradition loses its authority and ability to make the stringent demands it did before. The reason this is odd is because the opposite seems to happen with Christianity: guilt and power grow in opposing directions—the powerlessness of the oppressed is coupled with infinite guilt. See also footnote 119 on the possibility that Nietzsche is intentionally misleading his readers in GM

obligations. The religious debts, when they're 'maximized' (Christianized), necessarily can't be paid off in *this* life. For this reason, they also demand a new conception of an afterlife, e.g., "eternal punishment" or "karma," etc., where they *can* be paid off.[87] They become, in a sense, atemporal altogether.

There is an obvious problem, however. How does this story demonstrate that *moral obligation* is demanding? Perhaps Christian morality is demanding, but modern morality isn't committed to or explicitly dependent on Christian dogma. Modern morality is an avowedly secular, 'post-metaphysical' form of ethical life. The moment God is removed, so is the debt and the obligation of repayment. There's no obligation to obey God's law, if the God who commands it doesn't exist (cf. Schopenhauer 1839/1841; Anscombe 1958). There seems to be an explanatory gap from the Christian outlook to the 'disenchanted' moral one. Let's call this *the morality problem*. The account seems incomplete, then. DCS isn't sufficient for explaining how moral obligation became exceedingly demanding.[88]

In fact, though, Nietzsche himself acknowledges this incompleteness. After offering the account of the evolution of debt that culminates with the "maximal God" of Christianity and the infinite obligation, he writes: "I have until now intentionally left aside the actual moralization of these concepts [i.e., obligation and guilt]" (GM II: 21). It is this moralization

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II: §19-20.

[87] Lawrence Hatab (2008) offers a compelling investigation of the meaning of the afterlife in Greek mythology and how it is distinct from the Christian conception.

[88] I should note that the scholarship on GM II has tended to focus on a different but related problem: why should an infinite debt to God (or the ancestors) not just be another debt? (Clark 1994). That is, why should the failure to repay such a debt or uphold one's obligation generate a feeling of *guilt*? In other words, how and why did the connection between obligation and the negatively affectively loaded thought, "I *ought not* have done that" occur? Of course, the answer to that puzzle has to do with Nietzsche's account of bad conscience, which we will presently investigate.

that explains why moral obligation can outlive belief in God. As I read it, Nietzsche's point is that our understanding of the emergence of the Christian God himself, and (hence) the emergence of the infinite obligation that is owed to him, remains incomplete, unless we incorporate the "moralization" of obligation into our account. The concepts of obligation and guilt are moralized, Nietzsche cryptically claims, when they're "pushed back into *bad* conscience," or, as he also says, "the entanglement of *bad* conscience with the concept of God" (GM II: 21). The most crucial missing ingredient, then, seems to be *bad conscience*. Let's then see if an examination of bad conscience helps us complete Nietzsche's account of the genealogy of moral demandingness.

2. The Bad Conscience Strand

2.1. Bad Conscience and Oppression

"Bad conscience," Nietzsche writes, is the "deep sickness into which man had to fall under the pressure of that most fundamental of all changes he ever experienced—the change of finding himself enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace" (GM II: §16). What is this "sickness"? He answers, it's the "*internalization* of man;" or the 'turning inwards' of the human being's aggressive drives[89] (GM II: §16). Nietzsche postulates that human beings have

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[89] Nietzsche sometimes talks about aggressive "instincts" rather than "drives." Although it's possible (and even likely) that there's a principled distinction between instincts and drives for Nietzsche, I'll treat them here roughly synonymously as I don't think much will turn on the difference between them in this case. For a distinction between drives and instincts that would have been familiar to Nietzsche, see Schopenhauer WWR II: §27 and §44. For further discussion, see Riccardi (2021), Alfano (2019), and Katsafanas (2016).

by nature aggressive drives: "Hostility, cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction" (ibid). These "instincts of freedom … of the wild free human," Nietzsche says, "turned themselves backwards *against man himself*" (ibid).[90] Still, this invites the question why did these instincts have to be repressed at all?

If we have followed Nietzsche's discussion so far, we might anticipate an answer that is rooted in the Creditor-Debtor Strand. As we noted, communal obligations demand that we refrain from assaulting, murdering, and robbing (etc.) each other. That is the generalized content of those "five, six "I will nots"" that become entrenched in memory. Obedience to these foundational rules is part of the communal contract. But, to do this successfully (to form a "memory of the will") we must learn to control our aggressive drives.[91] These drives push us towards performing exactly those forbidden acts. The community cannot risk compromising its safety and stability by giving these drives free reign. So, because these anti-social instincts threaten its integrity, the community must find a way to discipline people and tame their aggressive, violent impulses. This happens, supposedly, through socialization and the "terrible bulwarks" it employs, those "old German punishments" discussed above. This nevertheless doesn't eliminate the drives themselves but suppresses their overt expression. Drives don't just disappear when they're suppressed. Rather, they seek another form of expression or discharge

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[90] Reginster (2021) interprets these aggressive drives or "instinct for freedom" as a reference to the will to power. For Reginster, the will to power is the "drive to imposing one's "own form" on the world of bending it to one's will" (147). There is certainly textual evidence for this (GM II: §18), but it introduces a complicated question. If the will to power is about the 'manner' in which drives pursue their determinate ends, then does it make sense to claim the aggressive drives *are* the will to power? Don't the aggressive drives often have some determinate end? Reginster's answer is that the "paradigmatic" expression of this drive is through hostility, cruelty, etc. (GM II: §16).

[91] Nietzsche also emphasizes the need to control or suppress our faculty of "forgetfulness." In GM II: §1-3, he talks as if that's the real challenge—human beings are forgetful creatures, so how can we ensure that they'll remember to obey society's rules? But, in GM II: §16 the focus shifts almost entirely to the aggressive drives themselves.

when the normal channels are blocked (GM II: §16). In absence of an external target, Nietzsche claims, they turn to the only target that's left: the bearer of the instincts herself—the agent. So, the internalization of the aggressive drives arises from the needs of the community and the contractual relation between it and its members: "You (individual) will control your aggression; and I (community) will continue to provide you with the communal goods you've so far enjoyed."

But Nietzsche quite explicitly rejects this answer:

> To the presupposition of this hypothesis on the origin of bad conscience belongs first, that this change was not gradual, not voluntary, and that it presented itself not as an organic growing into new conditions, but rather as a break, a leap, a compulsion, an inescapable doom … Second, however, that this fitting of a previously unrestrained and unformed population into a fixed form, given its beginning in an act of force, could be brought about to its completion only by acts of force—that the oldest "state" accordingly made its appearance as a terrible tyranny, as a crushing and ruthless machinery, and continued to work until finally such a raw material of people and half-animals was not only thoroughly kneaded and pliable but also *formed*. I use the word "state": it goes without saying who is meant by this—some pack of blond beasts of prey, a race of conquerors and lords, which, organized in a warlike manner and with the power to organize, unhesitatingly lays its terrible paws on a population enormously superior in numbers perhaps, but still formless, still roaming about. It is in this manner, then, that the "state" begins on earth: I think the flight of fancy that had it beginning with a "contract" has been abandoned. Whoever can give orders, whoever is "lord" by nature, whoever steps forth violently, in deed and gesture—what does he have to do with contracts! (GM II: §17).

"Bad conscience" is *not* the result of a communal arrangement that is founded on or by a social contract.[92] Force, violence, oppression, conquest; that's the social foundation out of which the

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[92] Classical contract theorists (e.g., Hobbes) typically took the contract to be hypothetical, though. But Nietzsche's deeper point, I think, is that there's something misleading about thinking of society as operating on a contract-like basis in general. The social relations and institutions that grow out of the *real* and *inegalitarian* origins of the state will bear the mark of these origins. In this historical context, contract theory played a revisionary role by rethinking the *normative* basis of society and political authority: it recasts them in terms of equality, fairness, mutual recognition, and cooperation. Today, of course, the critique of liberal contract theory has the opposite flavor. It is accused of obscuring and justifying conservative institutions and oppressive social relations. The most famous

bad conscience arises. There is, consequently, something ironic and misleading about Nietzsche's claim that the subjugated population 'found itself' within the "sway of society and peace" (GM II: §16). The community—under the "morality of custom"—that Nietzsche describes in GM II: 9 is related to its members as a creditor to debtors because it provides them with goods and expects something in return, namely, obedience to the community's customs. But the specific form of the "morality of custom" into which the subjugated population of GM II: §16 becomes "wedged" is forced onto them. It is not custom of their own making; it is the custom of their conquerors. It reflects neither their values nor their interests. Nietzsche specifies that, if there ever is a genuine contract, then it is made between "parties of approximately equal power" (GM II: §10; cf. HH I: §92; WS §26; D §112). They must make an agreement with each other, reach a mutual "understanding," but "in regard to less powerful parties, to *force* them to a settlement among themselves" (GM II: §10; cf. BGE §259). Masters might have contractual relations with each other, but no master has a genuine *contract* with his slaves.[93] GM II: §16 therefore presents us with a social formation that is founded on violence rather than on an ongoing, mutually beneficial, cooperative agreement.[94]

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contemporary examples of such a critique can be found in Charles Mills (1997) and Carole Pateman (1988). If the view I am articulating here is correct, then Nietzsche—along with Marx—should be seen as an important precursor to this mode of social and political critique. Consider, for comparison, Marx's claim in *Capital* (1867) about the mythos of the origin of class division:

> [Class division] is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. In times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent, and above all, frugal elite; the other lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living … Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and latter sort had at least nothing to sell except their own skins … In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play the great part (431).

[93] This is not to say that the masters won't come to employ the model of a contract as an *ideological veneer* for their relations with slaves. As David Graeber (2011, 109-113) notes, relations founded on conquest often do come to be seen as 'contractual,' even though they're not. Nietzsche seems to suggest that spinning these kinds of justificatory tales was a role that was assigned to the priestly branch of the aristocracy (GM III: §15; HH I: §472).

[94] Perhaps, it might be suggested, Nietzsche is providing an explanation for how the "morality of custom" begins?

Bad conscience, then, I suggest, should be understood as *the form that conscience takes under historical conditions of severe oppression.*[95] That is, these special social conditions are not intended to explain the internalization of the aggressive drives as such, but, rather, the *character that this internalization takes under the oppressive social conditions in question.*[96] The founding act of conquest deprives the subjugated population from access to the world outside the enclosed walls of society, where they had been previously adapted to "wilderness, war, roaming about, adventure," etc. (GM II: §16). But the rudimentary customs that make coexistence possible, i.e., communal obligations, wouldn't allow them to discharge their aggressive drives against each other. And, of course, they're quite literally unable to discharge their aggressive drives on their conquerors, or otherwise the latter wouldn't *be* conquerors at all. They're thus denied "the

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This seems to be corroborated by some claims he makes in GM II: 16. But there's also some reason to suspect this is not the case and that the masters are already within the morality of custom themselves (BGE §260; GM I: §11). Cf. Ridley (1998) and Owen (2007). Consider, for instance, Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia. This sacrifice is directed towards the social good; it is done for the community's sake and it required the hero to put his 'merely' personal interests and attachments aside. (D §9). It's also possible that the morality of custom emerges in different ways; in some cases, through conquest, in other cases more 'naturally' and over time. But the blueprint is always the same (D §18).

[95] Note that the development of bad conscience isn't a *necessary* development. Genealogy isn't teleology. Rather, it reconstructs what (on Nietzsche's view) did occur, though things could have gone differently. In a sense, that's one of the very goals of Nietzschean genealogy—to illuminate or unveil the contingency of practices, values, norms, etc. that otherwise have an aura of necessity. Genealogy lifts the veil from the "unconditional," the "eternal," which has been especially attached to morality (GS §345).

[96] This introduces some really difficult questions about the relation between *bad conscience* and *conscience*. It seems as if Nietzsche has two different stories about the emergence of bad conscience—one in GM II: 3 and the other in GM II: §16. But, I think, that we should understand Nietzsche's story in GM II: § 3 as a story about the emergence of conscience as a faculty. It is a story that's meant to have universal scope. It's about the "morality of custom," which Nietzsche seemed to think was a universal form of rudimentary social organization (GM III: §9; D §18). This involves the "internalization" of the aggressive drives. This, however, isn't identical to the formation of *bad* conscience. Bad conscience is not a distinctive mental faculty; rather, it is a certain character that conscience takes under—I am claiming—certain social conditions of oppression. The reason it is hard to see this in the text is because GM II: §16 seems to suggest that the people being conquered are almost like Rousseau-type solitary individuals with no mental life or customs whatsoever. I think, though, that Nietzsche is perhaps intentionally trying to mislead his readers, to make it seems as if this is just what 'society' does to them—again, like Rousseau—but only to suggest that this is a peculiar, non-universal historical development in GM II: §17. (For more on Nietzsche's two narratives about the development of bad conscience, see Reginster 2021.)

true reaction, that of deeds" (GM I: §10). So, Nietzsche's theory is that these drives have no other option; they must be discharged on the self: "All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn themselves inwardly*—this is what I call the *internalizing* of man: thus first grows in man that which he later calls his "soul". The entire inner world, originally thin as if inserted between two skins, has spread and unfolded, has taken on depth, breadth, height to the same extent that man's outward discharging has been *obstructed*" (GM II: §16).[97] The aggressive drives thus become the voice of conscience: the drives express themselves through self-reproach and self-castigation because they have nowhere else to go; it's their *extrema ratio*.[98]

2.2. Punishment and Obligation

The account of BCS sketched so far perhaps raises more questions than it answers, however. Most importantly, it doesn't yet provide an answer to the central question: what does all this

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[97] *Must* the instincts be discharged on the self, though? Why can't they be discharged on non-human animals, plants, or inanimate objects? Nietzsche doesn't directly address this, but I'd like to offer a speculative answer. I think that the answer may have something to do with the source that forces the repression in the first place, namely, the conquering masters. The oppressed population develop *ressentiment* towards the latter. They therefore experience a double-sided problem. They need to express their aggressive *instincts*, but also to affirm their dominance as *agents*. Ideally, they'd be able to satisfy the latter through the former, e.g., by simply overthrowing the masters. This, of course, isn't an option. Dominating plants, trees, animals, or other inanimate objects might provide relief for the instincts but won't restore their damaged sense of agency. In fact, it might just exacerbate it and create even more repressed aggression. It's possible, also, that being aggressive towards inanimate objects or non-human animals might be *too* easy for them and, therefore, unsatisfying for the aggressive drives. (I thank Eric Schwitzgebel for raising this question.)

[98] It should be mentioned that Nietzsche, as Janaway (and Ridley 1998) notes, isn't entirely consistent with the use of the term "bad conscience." That's one of the reasons it has been so difficult to form a consensus about its meaning. For instance, my interpretation that bad conscience is a development of conscience under oppressive conditions doesn't fit Nietzsche's (apparent) claim that the Greeks also had bad conscience (although managed to "keep it at arm's length") or his claim that it would be possible to attach bad conscience to the "unnatural" instincts, e.g., to selflessness, etc. (GM II: §24). I am not claiming, then, that the account I am offering of bad conscience is the only or exclusively correct account of Nietzsche's use of the term. I am only claiming that it is the dominant notion Nietzsche is employing in his explanation of the development of *guilt* and *moral obligation*. (See also Zamosc 2011).

have to do with obligation, let alone the *demandingness* of *moral obligation*? To formulate an answer, I would like to consider Christopher Janaway's (2007) reading of the Second Treatise. Janaway's interpretation provides the resources for explaining why the aggressive drives would gravitate to the mechanism of obligation in the first place. Janaway's main aim is to demonstrate how the two narrative strands we have been examining—DCS and BCS—can be reconciled and combined to form a unitary, coherent, genealogical account.[99] This, he thinks, can be accomplished when we incorporate the role that *punishment* plays into the overarching narrative.

Punishment first arises in the context of the debtor-creditor relationship. In that context, punishment serves as a means for both (a) *enforcing repayment* of debts, but also (b) *extracting repayment* when contracts have been violated. Nietzsche's remarks in GM II: §3 suggest that the main mechanism for enforcing compliance with interpersonal contracts in primeval communities was the threat of punishment. But once reneging has already occurred punishment itself could also serve as a form of repayment or a means of extracting what's owed. This is especially true when the creditor could, through punishing the debtor, participate in what Nietzsche calls the "*right of lords*: finally he, too, for once attains the elevating feeling of being permitted to hold a being in contempt and maltreat it as something "beneath himself"" (GM II: §5). That is, the creditor gained the right to be literally violent, cruel, etc. towards his debtor or to enjoy the vicarious infliction of suffering on him by the legal "authorities."[100] As expected in light of GM II: §16-17, the enjoyment taken in such violence

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[99] Janaway wants to combine DCS and BCS to explain moral guilt, but we're interested primarily in how this could explain moral obligation. The two are connected, though, so I am not departing radically from Janaway's explanatory target.

[100] See also Reginster 2021 (134-38) for a compelling interpretation of these claims in terms of the will to power.

increased in proportion to the lowliness of the social status and positioning of the creditor himself; the enjoyment is so much greater because the opportunities to express and discharge one's aggression are so much scarcer (GM II: §5).

Janaway's suggestion is that bad conscience (BCS) and the debtor-creditor relation (DCS) can be bridged or combined once we recognize that punishment is an especially efficient tool for discharging the aggressive drives on the self. But then what *is* the punishment that one subjects oneself to? And what, moreover, is the punishment *for*? The punishment, Janaway says, is the feeling of *guilt*; and, as in the creditor-debtor relationship, it is punishment for the violation of an *obligation*. He explains:

> What differentiates guilt from other kinds of psychological pain? It must be the way the subject represents herself: she must at least take herself to have done harm, to have transgressed, usually against some other agent, in such a way as to violate an obligation she accepts herself be under. To feel guilty requires an inner suffering that one represents as undergone because one has departed from what one believes one ought to do, in a way that is likely to cause anger or resentment from others, and would permit them to despise or maltreat one (2007, 136).

Janaway's thesis is that the aggressive drives weaponize the debtor-creditor relation as a means for discharging themselves on the self in the form of guilt, or punishment for one's reprehensible actions. This, as Janaway suggests, requires the development of a certain self-conception. The internal life of the self must become modeled on the creditor-debtor relationship. The self is fragmented: the "I" becomes both creditor and debtor; punisher and punishee. This self-fragmentation enables me to become an enforcer of those obligations I take myself to be under, i.e., I punish myself for failing to meet my obligations.[101]

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[101] This does not mean this modeling is created, performed, or recognized consciously. As Janaway suggests, there is typically an "identification" with the person or group that could hold such transgressions against us: "I

Here it becomes clear why Nietzsche is talking about *conscience* in the first place. Conscience warns me when I am about to do something wrong or bad, and it punishes me when I fail to heed its warnings. This, though, shows why the self-fragmentation mentioned above isn't sufficient for the possibility of feeling guilt. The possibility of guilt also requires recognizing one's obligations as being *authoritative for oneself*—that one *ought* to honor one's obligations. The uniqueness of conscience isn't so much in *what* it says, but in *how* it says it, viz., with a recognized authority.[102] It is absolutely crucial to emphasize that the "authority" in this context is not a matter of recognizing the merely legal legitimacy of the obligations or that others have an institutionally enforceable expectation of oneself. For instance, while I recognize that I am legally obligated to be punctual in the workplace, I don't necessarily feel guilty about being late for my weekend shift at McDonalds. The authority isn't a matter of mere prudence either. I recognize that I could be severely punished by the legal system if I rob a McDonalds restaurant, but I might not feel guilty at all for doing so.[103] The authority is

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cannot feel guilt unless I believe that there is something I have done which I truly ought not to have done, that I have violated an obligation that I conceive myself genuinely and rightly to be under. It is plausible that the feeling of guilt is a process whereby some putatively permitted or rightful punishment is exacted internally by means of a partial identification with those whom one conceives as angered by one's transgression" (136; cf. May 1999, 62). So, although it's clear that I am engaging in a form of self-punishment when I feel guilt, I represent the 'creditor' as someone other than myself—another person, the community, an ancestor, God. Hence, feelings of guilt commonly prompt wrongdoers to engage in reparative activities, e.g., seek amends, apologize, or compensate the victims of their wrongdoing. They owe it to *them* to 'make things right.'

[102] Richardson says that conscience, for Nietzsche, is "no other than this power to remember the rules" (2020, 195). But that can't be right. I can remember that there's some rule, say, that one must abide by one's promises, without being in the least motivated to follow it. The importance of conscience is found in the normative status it confers on the rules, not in the capacity to merely recall what the rules are.

[103] As Velleman writes, "the dictates of conscience carry an authority that distinguishes them from other thoughts about what you ought or ought not to do. The voice of conscience is, metaphorically speaking, the voice of this authority. To recognize an 'ought' as delivered in the voice of conscience is to recognize it as carrying a different degree or kind of authority from the ordinary 'ought', and hence as due a different degree or kind of deference" (2005, 111)
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expressed instead through an attitude that is more like endorsement: I must endorse these obligations if it is possible for me to feel guilty for my failure to honor them. I must identify with them. In Korsgaard's (1996) language, upholding these obligations must correspond to my "practical identity," i.e., a "description under which I value myself." That I am someone who fulfills his obligations must be a crucial metric in which my *self-worth* is anchored. Indeed, in morality's case, it must be anchored in a *necessary* practical identity that is therefore also necessarily connected to my self-worth; it must be a practical identity that undergirds or conditions all my other practical identities such that my self-worth is constitutionally dependent on upholding *its* particular demands. Consequently, the violation of moral obligation is experienced as a painful emotion of personal failure that one implicitly inflicts on oneself through self-castigation: guilt.[104] This, note, doesn't necessarily mean that I see myself as the *source* of the obligations' authority. It means only that the authority—whether its source is the community, practical reason, or God himself—is something that I recognize and take as a reason for action (partly) because of its attachment to my practical identity and, hence, to my self-worth.

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[104] Why guilt though? Why not shame? Clark (2015 [2001]) addresses this question. Morality, she claims (via a Nietzschean interpretation of Williams) does a poor job at disentangling between (a) one's relation to a person she has injured; and (b) one's self-relation given the standards she accepts for what it means to be a good person. Guilt is usually felt when we've injured someone, and feel some "indebtedness" towards them, but it is also typically taken to reflect badly on oneself. "I am bad because I hurt you." (In the Christian scheme, the offended party can be God himself [GS §135]—as he sees into one's heart rather than being affected by one's overt actions.) But, Clark says, these two things are separate from one another. I might regret what I've done to you, but that's separable from how I should feel about myself. Guilt is only a debt that one owes, but not something that "in itself" bears on my worth as a person (2015 [2001], 58). The proper response to violating one's own standards of value isn't guilt, it is shame, but that's exactly what morality prevents us from seeing and disentangling. This helps explain Zarathustra's saying: "if a friend does you evil, then say: "I forgive you what you did to me; but that you have done it to yourself—how could I forgive that?" (Z II: 3).

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The aggressive drives therefore monopolize the concept of obligation for the purpose of discharging themselves as punishment, as "guilt," back onto the self. It's the tool that the drives employ for lack of having any other reliable source of satisfaction. In the feeling of guilt, the drives can finally attain the repressed satisfaction that they've otherwise been denied. This claim might seem premature, though. Why would the aggressive drives need *any* concept, let alone a moral one, to discharge themselves on the self? In the case of the 'caged beast,' for instance, Nietzsche says, the animal might 'rub itself raw' on the bars of the cage. Why can't humans just engage in self-harm like the caged beast? Nietzsche doesn't quite address this, but in the Third Treatise we do receive something like a preliminary explanation: human beings don't just do stuff instinctively but, rather, they need *reasons* for action (GM III: §15; cf. GS §1). If they're provided with a "why," they can put up with almost any "how" (TI "Maxims" §12). The violation of obligation provides them with such a reason.

But this still doesn't get us far enough. In order to generate guilt—and therefore satisfy the aggressive drives—the agent must represent herself as having violated obligations that she takes to be authoritative for herself. This, I think, is the key to explaining the moralization of obligation; and the crucial point is that the concept of obligation is fully "moralized" only once it becomes exceedingly *demanding.* The demandingness guarantees the violation of obligation and thereby the degree of guilt that's necessary for the satisfaction of the repressed and frustrated aggressive drives.

Where is such demandingness to be found, however? Even if we assume, as is plausible, that the oppressed people of GM II: §16-17 recognize and uphold some communal obligations, I argued above (in section 1) that communal obligations weren't demanding, on Nietzsche's view. They are simply the basic expectations that we hold each other to as a

presupposition for our stable, ongoing, social coexistence. If those undemanding communal obligations were frequently violated, social life as such would become impossible and undesirable; and that's certainly not a goal on the agenda of the oppressed people of GM II: §16. On the contrary, Nietzsche claims, "[T]he strong strive just as naturally and necessarily *away* from each other as the weak strive *toward* each other" (GM III: §18). So, for instance, "When one looks for the beginnings of Christianity in the Roman world, one finds associations for mutual support, pauper-, invalid-, burial-associations, which sprung up on the undermost soil of society of that time" (ibid., cf. A §21). Solidarity, mutual support, "herd-formation": these are all sources of satisfaction for the oppressed, on Nietzsche's view, that arouse their "will to power" (ibid).[105] They'll thus be averse to violating the communal obligations that make this form of satisfaction possible.[106] The aggressive drives therefore require a different form of obligation; they need a *transformation in the conception of obligation* that will catapult it beyond the jurisdiction of communal obligation and the limited satisfaction it affords to the obstructed aggressive drives. The question, then is: What's the transformation or how does the conception of obligation become demanding?

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[105] This shouldn't be read as implying that the slaves have no inclination to fight amongst themselves. Nietzsche suggests the opposite (GM III: §15). Indeed, under conditions of oppression they'll be more likely to discharge their aggressive drives on each other. But this wouldn't work in their interests either. It would deprive them of the good of community and it would also decrease their possibility of confronting and condemning the masters. If the slaves feel entitled to treat *each other* like slaves, then why would the masters not be entitled to do the same? For Nietzsche, this is prevented by having *ressentiment* redirected towards the self, and that involves the moralization of obligation.

[106] This doesn't mean the 'weak' don't have non- or anti-aggressive instincts as well. If they didn't, then the aggressive drives would pose no problem. Nietzsche—like Plato before him and Freud after—didn't think that our psyche is constituted rationally in the sense that all our drives and affects necessarily share (*prima facie*) compatible aims (see, e.g., GS §333). We're often pulled in different directions; and we construct elaborate justifications for our impulses, or deceive ourselves about their existence, etc. But it is crucial to note that this conflict between the drives isn't understood by Nietzsche as fundamentally *bad* or as something that must be overcome. Rather, it is the material that grounds a project of self-formation, a "political order" of the soul, that makes the kinds of cultural goods that Nietzsche appreciates possible. (See, for instance, GS §290; BGE §200, §257; GM II: §16; WP §966).

2.3. The Ascetic Ideal and Moral Obligation

The transformation, I claim, is that obligation becomes conceptualized under the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal, as we saw in Chapter 2, is both deontic and evaluative. It posits the denial of nature and life as the highest value, but also imposes this as an obligatory project: the complete overcoming of one's instincts and natural inclinations, i.e., absolute self-denial as a categorical imperative.[107] The transformation is therefore both in the *content* and the *form* of obligation. The content becomes ascetic, the form becomes unconditional or absolute.[108] Let's elaborate this in more detail.

The ascetic content receives its formulation in morality's more recognizable vocabulary: the demand for selflessness, beneficence, altruism, self-sacrifice, compassion, etc. In the preface to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche claims that his primary concern isn't with the "origin" of morality, but with its *value* (GM P: §6). The centrality of self-denial to morality—compassion, self-sacrifice, selflessness, etc.—is emphasized by Nietzsche repeatedly. (See, e.g., HH I: §95, §132; AOM §34; D §108, §132, §174, §215; GS §326, §338, §345; BGE §55; GM

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[107] There is a caveat, though: the ascetic ideal doesn't necessarily deny the "good" instincts and desires, e.g., for compassion or 'love of God,' but Nietzsche is clear that in such cases these instincts and desires are construed in supernatural rather than natural terms. This is evident in Kant's discussion of respect and Schopenhauer's discussion of compassion, both of which have a "noumenal" connection and are not reducible to anything that's merely natural or phenomenal. To preserve an attitude's moral value, it must be *segregated* from nature.

[108] The closest approximation I find to this in the secondary literature comes from Simon May, who writes: "Bad conscience and guilt are moralized, Nietzsche seems to suggest, when they are blamed on, or interpreted in terms of, some putatively innate corruption of human nature (or, more generally, of 'life' or 'the world') which one must therefore strive to suppress, extirpate, or 'transcend'. In the case of guilt, this supposed corruption is used to explain the belief that debts are both undischargeable and continually being incurred (say to gods or society). In the case of bad conscience, it is used to explain both the inevitable recalcitrance of one's 'animal' nature and the pain attendant on the effort to tame it. In both cases, guilt comes to be seen as constitutive of human nature—indeed, as one of its main defining features" (1999, 70).

P: §5; TI "Morality" §4; EH "Destiny" §7-8; WP §275, §245). It is important to note that although Nietzsche seems most concerned with Schopenhauer's "morality of compassion" in the preface of the *Genealogy*, he's just as concerned with Christianity, Kantianism, utilitarianism, and other contemporary moral theories and the manner in which they inform and reflect moral culture. Morality, in the relevant sense, is concerned with how we ought to *treat* others and not merely with our *feelings* towards them (cf. Reginster 2021, 91). It is a matter of showing proper consideration to other people's interests and their inherent worth; and this can be construed in various ways, e.g., in Kantian terms as respect for rational agency, in Schopenhauerian or utilitarian terms as sensitivity to others' capacity to suffer, in Christian terms as "love" of one's neighbor. The difference between these should be understood as a debate *within* morality, not as a debate between different moralit*ies*; and that's because the central plank that has implicitly dominated each, on Nietzsche's view, is the fundamental demand for self-denial and the overcoming of human nature.

The obligation of self-denial *qua* the overcoming of human nature is surely an exceedingly demanding moral obligation. Our nature is "inescapable;" it is present in everything that we do because it is what we essentially *are*. It is not something that is genuinely possible for us to overcome—all human thought and action always leaves behind an 'immoral remainder,' a trace of those parts of human nature that haven't been fully overcome.[109] This demand receives its clearest expression, for Nietzsche, in Christianity and its conception of God:

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[109] Compare with Kant: "For love of humankind I am willing to admit that even most of our actions are in conformity with duty; but if we look more closely at the intentions and aspirations in them we everywhere come upon the dear self, which is always turning up; and it is on this that their purpose is based, not on the strict command of duty, which would often require self-denial" (GMM 4:408).

> In "God" he [man] captures the most extreme opposites he can find to his actual and inescapable animal instincts; he reinterprets these animal instincts themselves as guilt before God (as hostility, rebellion, insurrection against the "lord," the "father," the primal ancestor and beginning of the world); he harnesses himself into the contradiction "God" and "devil"; he takes all the "no" that he says to himself as a "yes," as existing, corporeal, real, as God, as holiness of God, as judgeship of God, as executionership of God, as beyond, as eternity, as torture without end, as hell, as immeasurability of punishment and guilt (GM II: §22)

God is constructed in opposition to human nature, as its evaluative negation. This is Nietzsche's inversion of Feuerbach's famous thesis that God is the personification of all of humanity's essential qualities. In God, the human being worship himself, or his *perfected* nature. But the human being doesn't recognize that this is what he's doing; he doesn't know he has projected his own nature onto an idealized, transcendent, inhuman entity that he now worships as if it wasn't his own creation and (aspirational) mirror image.[110] For Nietzsche, conversely, God *really* is the opposite; and that's exactly the point. The "no" the human says to himself becomes the "yes" he says to God (Cf. A §24-25). In comparing himself to God, the person "compares himself with a being which alone is capable of those actions called unegoistic and lives continually in the consciousness of a selfless mode of thought … [I]t is because he looks into this brilliant mirror that his own nature seems to him so abysmal, so uncommonly

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[110] Feuerbach writes, "Religion, at least the Christian, is the relation of man to himself, or more correctly to his own nature (*i.e.,* his subjective nature); but a relation to it, viewed as a nature apart from his own. The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of individual man, made objective—*i.e.*, contemplated and revered as another, distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes to the human nature" (2004 [1841], 16). Feuerbach himself could plausibly be interpreted as expanding on the presocratic Xenophanes, although I'm unaware of evidence that Feuerbach was in fact influenced by him. Xenophanes is famously quoted as saying, "If oxen and horses and lions had hands and were able to draw with their hands and do the same things as men, horses would draw the shapes of gods to look like horses and oxen to look like oxen, and each would make the gods' bodies have the same shape as they themselves had" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.23 1399b6-9).

distorted" (HH I: §132; cf. HH I: §114; GS §135, §139; GM II: §23; EH "Destiny" §8).[111]

Unlike communal obligations—which aren't designed for failure—Christianized obligations are designed to generate maximal moral failure and, hence, maximal guilt or a feeling of irredeemable "sinfulness":

> Go through the moral demands exhibited in the documents of Christianity one by one and you will find that in every case they are exaggerated, so that man *could* not live up to them; the intention is not that he should *become* more moral, but that he should feel *as sinful as possible* (HH I: §141)

> In the New Testament, the canon of virtue, of the fulfilled law, is set up: but in such a way that it is the canon of *impossible virtue*: those still *striving* after morality are in the face of such a canon to learn to feel themselves ever *more distant* from their goal, they are to *despair* of virtue, and in the end *throw themselves on the bosom* of the merciful – only if it ended in this way could the Christian's moral effort be regarded as possessing any value, with the presupposition therefore that it always remains an unsuccessful, miserable, melancholy *effort* […] (D §87; cf. D §321).[112]

These impossible demands are essentially ascetic; they impose regiments of self-denial that have taken on various forms, from flagellations to philanthropy. But, in every case, they serve the same instinctual goal—the release of systematically and severely obstructed aggressive drives—which is enabled by the ascetic (moral) conception of obligation. So, as Nietzsche explains the Christian conception of God,

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[111] Recall that Nietzsche claims obligation is "moralized" when bad conscience becomes entangled with the "concept of God" (GM II: §21). It is typically assumed that this involves using the notion of "debt" to God as a means for self-cruelty. HH I: §132 raises another option, though: they become entangled when God is used as an evaluative standard for assessing oneself. These two interpretive options aren't incompatible. There's reason to think Nietzsche meant to use both. If the concept of God becomes entangled with bad conscience in the latter sense—as a standard for self-assessment—this helps explain how guilt could survive belief in God, for instance.

[112] Elsewhere, Nietzsche contradicts this view: "Even within Christianity there exists an Epicurean point-of-view: it proceeds from the idea that God could demand of man, his creature and likeness, only that which it is *possible* for the latter to accomplish, and that Christian virtue and perfection must therefore be achievable and frequently achieved" (AOM §96; cf. D §59, §68). But the discussion in 2.4 suggests these passages can be read as compatible with the ones I quoted.

One will already have guessed *what* actually happened with all of this and *under* all of this: that will to self-torment, that suppressed cruelty of the animal-human who had been made inwards, scared back into himself, of the one locked up in the "state" for the purpose of taming, who invented the bad conscience in order to cause himself pain after the *more natural* outlet for this *desire to cause pain* was blocked,—this man of bad conscience has taken over the religious presupposition in order to drive his self-torture to its most gruesome severity and sharpness (GM II: §22).

The moralized conception of obligation expresses, as Nietzsche suggests, the human being's "will" to find itself completely "worthless," i.e., absolutely guilty; incapable and unworthy of redemption. Once self-worth becomes attached to the obligation of total self-transcendence, failure and self-loathing will unavoidably come to characterize one's existential condition. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, writes that, "One does not offer an ethics to a god" (1947, 10). God doesn't need an ethics, presumably, because it's impossible for God to *fail* to be ethical. I am tempted, through Nietzsche's inverted Feuerbachian schema, to reverse de Beauvoir's claim and say that morality is offered to humans precisely to ensure the inevitability of their failure. If ethical failure isn't an option for God, moral success isn't an option for humans. That, again, is the point: the failure enables the aggressive drives to express themselves on the self in the form of guilt.

But—one might reasonably ask—couldn't all this be achieved without making self-denial *obligatory*? It seems entirely sufficient to promote self-denial as a supererogatory ethical ideal. Couldn't the aggressive drives satisfy themselves through generating *shame* for failing to live up to such an ideal, e.g., "God on the cross," rather than guilt for violating obligation?[113]

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[113] See again footnote 104. The feeling that we have in relation to God—the worthlessness—seems more accurately described as shame. This seems correct, but it raises the question *why* does morality construe it as guilt? Risse (2005) suggests that Nietzsche is relying on a very particular notion of guilt, which he calls "existential guilt." He explains that it is "guilt as a condition that shape's one's whole existence. Guilt on this view is a persistent feeling of imperfection. Such guilt, *existential guilt*, presupposes a reference point vis-à-vis which one's

We have already discussed one answer to this challenge, viz., that obligation is an efficient tool for self-punishment. Now we can introduce a second, perhaps more compelling, response to it: moral obligation is also the most efficient tool for representing one's actions as *selfless*.

The roots of this view are present already in the communal conception of obligation. The capacity to perform one's communal obligations requires agents to disregard their "momentary affect and desire" (GM II: §3) for the sake of the communal whole (GM II: §9). Under the "morality of custom," Nietzsche writes in an earlier text, "if an action is performed *not* because tradition commands it but for other motives (because of its usefulness to the individual, for example), even indeed for precisely the motives which once founded the tradition, it is called immoral and is felt to be so by him who performed it: for it was not performed in obedience to tradition … [Tradition] demanded one observe prescriptions *without thinking of oneself* as an individual" (D §9). Hence, Nietzsche says, "the individual is to sacrifice himself – that is the commandment of the morality of custom" (ibid). This, in turn, means that the *mark* of one's virtuousness in the communal context begins to track persons' willingness to sacrifice themselves for "tradition", i.e., to make themselves suffer:

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life is so experienced" (46). Risse is right, I think, to suggest that Nietzsche isn't focused on more 'local' forms of guilt that involve self-depreciating feelings in response to one's actions when they're judged to be reprehensible. But then, Risse should explain why existential guilt is *guilt* and why it is connected (and grows out of) the more local form of guilt that isn't Nietzsche's primary target. I'd like to suggest another answer as to why Nietzsche isn't talking here about shame. Moral guilt, recall, emerges under the context of oppression. Guilt and shame are both powerful emotions, but shame often signifies or focuses on one's powerlessness. Velleman, for instance, says that "Threats to your standing as a self-presenting creature are … a source of deep anxiety, and anxiety about the threatened loss of that standing is, in my view, what constitutes the emotion of shame" (2005, 55). Conversely, moral guilt is predicated on one's responsibility and, hence, one's *power* as an agent. If we couple this with the need to discharge aggression, then we have a good explanation for why these feelings came to be interpreted as guilt rather than shame. So, May (1999, 76) writes, "one reason for the frequent urge of human beings to accept guilt and responsibility where they have none is a deep-seated need to feel power over their lives … It suggests … that accepting guilt may, on occasions, be the only way of attributing efficacy to oneself—and, as a corollary, that the pain of guilt may, in such circumstances, be less than the pain of irrelevance" (76). (See also Janaway 2007, 115).

> Thus the concept of the 'most moral man' of the community came to include the virtue of the most frequent suffering, of privation, of the hard life, of cruel chastisement – *not*, to repeat it again and again, as a means of discipline, or self-control, or satisfying the desire for individual happiness – but as a virtue which will put the community in good odour with the evil gods and which steams up to them like a propitiatory sacrifice on the altar (D §18).

Nietzsche's account of the "morality of custom" and communal obligations in the Second Treatise of the *Genealogy* introduces a significant wrinkle to the picture he presents in *Daybreak*, though. The contractual character that Nietzsche attributes to communal obligation in the former work is in clear tension with the self-sacrificial commandment he attributes to "custom" in the latter.[114] The *transactional* and hence self-interested nature of communal obligation remains at best hidden below the surface of shared communal life. If I am honoring my obligations not because they *are* obligations, but because I am afraid of the punishments that might follow from their violation or I am concerned with losing the benefits that are attached to being a 'law-abiding citizen,' then I am not acting in a manner that merits being called "selfless" or "unegoistic."[115]   I am just being prudent. This might suggest that the

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[114] There's another important potential difference between the accounts. In Nietzsche's earlier works, he seems to think that the morality of custom is more or less uniform—it is the prehistoric form of social life that determined the "character" of humankind (D §18)—and that the formation of tradition is functionally, though not explicitly, aimed at the preservation of the community. (See, e.g., HH I: §96, D §18, GS §116-17, BGE §201). But, as I've argued, it becomes clear to Nietzsche that the situation is very different when communities are founded on acts of violence that divide society into a dominating class and a subordinate class. In such contexts, the 'tradition' and customs that arise are unlikely to reflect the interests of the community as a whole, but, rather, the interests of the dominators. This, arguably, is one of Nietzsche's qualms with the English psychologists; they're insensitive to the conflictual relations that may exist within communities, or the role of hierarchy, etc. in framing evaluative standards.

[115] Schopenhauer writes, "*Conditioned* obligation … naturally cannot be a fundamental concept of ethics, since everything done with respect to reward or punishment is necessarily an egoistic transaction, and as such is without purely moral value" (1839/1841, 56). For Schopenhauer, all obligation—all ethical "ought" statements—are conditional; they derive "all sense and meaning simply and solely in reference to threatened punishment or promised reward" (1839/1841, 55).

concept of the supererogatory is better suited for construing actions as selfless than the concept of obligation. Supererogatory actions, e.g., seriously risking one's own life to save a stranger's, are paradigmatically cases of voluntary self-sacrifice that are attached neither to guaranteed benefits and rewards if it is performed nor to the threats of punishments and disadvantages if it isn't.

Yet Nietzsche doesn't pursue this possibility. Why not? The argument, I think, is that the concept of the supererogatory introduces the possibility of what I'll call *exceptionalism*. In holding myself to ethical standards that I don't ascribe to others, I am making an exception of myself; I am formulating an ethical rule independently of the community and the customs that dominate therein. This introduces the concern of exceptionalism in two different senses. First, there's a concern about exceptionalism as *unpredictability* or lawlessness; and second, there's a concern about exceptionalism as *superiority* or dominance. The former concern leads us back to the opening section of the Second Treatise. There Nietzsche claims that the development of conscience requires the cultivation of an animal that can form a "memory of the will"—an animal that is "*permitted to promise*" (GM II: §1). Human beings must have a capacity to commit themselves to abide by some rules diachronically, a capacity that others can recognize *as such* a capacity. This would be a capacity to "command" our future selves, to ensure that our intentions won't suddenly change and that our ephemeral desires won't lead us astray from honoring the commitments we've made or undertaken. That means "man himself must first of all have become *calculable, regular, necessary,*" or law-like (GM II: §1; cf. HH I: §111). The social need for law-like behavior is clear. It's the basis on which we form reliable expectations of others and even of ourselves (GS §296). It enables us to *predict* each other's behavior. Those who don't conform to the law are thus seen as suspect: Why do they behave in ways that aren't

in conformity with the law? Do they perhaps think they're *above* the law? Can they therefore be trusted to follow the law *at all*? Exceptionalism in this sense—which Nietzsche often simply calls "individuality"—was therefore regarded as "evil" (by the community *and* the exceptional individual herself) because it signified standing apart from tradition, being independent of the community and the authority of custom and the "herd" (BGE §201; cf. D §9, §108, §174; GS §117, §296; WS §22; WP §280). "Hostility against this impulse to have an ideal of one's own was formerly the law of all morality," Nietzsche writes (GS §143; cf. BGE §199). Thus, he says, "whoever wanted to elevate himself above it [i.e., custom] had to become lawgiver and medicine man and a kind of demi-god: that is to say, he had to *make customs*" (D §9; cf. D §496; GM III: §9-11). That is, in order to avoid the charge of exceptionalism and avoid losing one's social standing, the individual had to invent *new* obligations and laws that she could then claim to be honoring.

Here we encounter exceptionalism's second face: superiority. The individual who goes 'beyond the call of duty' might appear selfless, but her behavior may court admiration for displaying *exceptional* selflessness. Her behavior is moral, but in an exceptional sense—she's morally excellent—and, if it's *too* good, then that threatens to elevate her above the members of her community. If she is excellent, then it's because other people are not; she must, then, be better than those others, even if only insofar as she's especially good at sacrificing herself for their sake! She thus stands apart from the community, alone, as its exception. Nietzsche's suggestion, I think, is that this becomes problematic for oppressed groups especially. As he argues in the First Treatise of the *Genealogy*, the "reevaluation of values" that is conducted by the priests involves an inversion of the oppressor's (masters) values, and a central plank of the masters' evaluative schema is the "*pathos of distance*," the sense of superiority over others. It is

akin to Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsychia*: "I deserve all the goods and honors because I am the best." The inversion of this—perhaps Aristotle would've called it *micropsychia*—is the attitude that says, "I deserve neither goods nor honors because I am the worst." The paradoxical trap here, though, is that the "worst" becomes proxy for the "best," as we saw in the case of the Catherine of Siena and the virtue of humility in Chapter 2. But if the exceptional-seeming, holier-than-thou behavior is framed as obligatory, then one can plausibly deny one's praiseworthiness or superiority. "I am not holding myself to a higher standard. I am not better than anyone; rather, I expect everyone to act as I do precisely *because* I am just like everyone; no one deserves praise for doing what they simply *ought* to do anyway—that is just common decency. If anything, I should be blamed for not doing *enough*." This, of course, is a façade. As Nietzsche claims, the weak desperately want to appear superior to their powerful masters (GM I: §14, III: §14); but there's a real tension in affirming one's superiority and maintaining a commitment to the normative equality of persons (contra *pathos of distance*). The concept of moral obligation enables the oppressed to delicately straddle the line and reconcile or at least conceal this tension (see also WP §774).

For these reasons, I think that a supererogatory evaluative ideal wouldn't be an efficient conceptual frame for discharging aggression onto the self. But even so, this still leaves the initial issue unresolved, i.e., the transactional character of communal obligations. If ethical obligations are understood contractually, then how can honoring one's obligations be grounded in anything but prudence? Here the *formal* transformation of the conception of obligation becomes relevant. Specifically, obligation becomes unconditional. (See, e.g, WS §44; GS §5, §345; BGE §46, §187, §199; A §11; EH "Destiny" §7). And the unconditional character of moral obligation inoculates it from its original prudential ground. As Simon Robertson says,

"if compliance with morality is categorically required, then one ought to comply with it irrespective of whether doing so serves or conflicts with one's subjective desires, aims, ends, interests and the like" (2009, 69). If moral obligation is defined in a manner that is oppositional to one's inclinations and 'subjective' interests and ends, then it certainly can't be *grounded* in them.

Yet I think that's not quite sufficient for evading the charge of prudence. Even if communal obligations aren't grounded in one's subjective desires, they can still be grounded in the community itself; and since one's membership in a specific community is a contingent matter, it begins to seem as if requiring non-members to abide by the community's obligations is a covert way of serving one's own ends under the guise of serving one's community. After all, one could always opt out or imagine oneself being a member of another community and therefore no longer bound by the former community's obligations. Communal obligations might be unconditional from *within* one's community, but without applying to those outside of one's community who inhabit the "outlawed condition" (GM II: §9). The enemies of the community aren't perceived as *wrongdoers* or *criminals* when they violate *our* customs. Enemies might be hated, but they're not necessarily resented. In Christianity, though, we ought to aspire towards love of our enemies; the enemies themselves are perceived as wrongdoers or "evil;" and, for Christian morality, there is nothing outside of the morally evaluative sphere. There are no actions that are in principle *un*evaluable morally or 'beyond good and evil.' The morality of good and evil is the final, complete, and only court of appeals. It says, "I am morality itself, and nothing besides [me] is morality" (BGE §202). That is, moral commands aren't just unconditional in that they're not conditioned by one's subjective desires and interests. They're also *inescapable* insofar as they're independent of one's particular communal membership.

Why is this? Why must morality's authority be unconditional and inescapable? Here we should recall that Nietzsche is considering developments that occur under conditions of oppression. The oppressed can't present the obligations that they have towards each other as obligations that the oppressors have towards them, if the ground of those obligations is membership in the oppressed community or class. Moreover, the oppressed cannot punish their oppressors for violations of their communal obligations. The trick they employ is to expand the scope of obligation by rejecting contingent community membership as a condition of being under (certain kinds of) obligation in the first place. In effect, this means the expansion of the conception of 'community' itself into a *necessary* community where one's membership in it is inescapable—you can't 'opt out.' The recognizable moral formulations of this inescapable community are the Kingdom of Ends, all rational creatures, and all God's children, i.e., *humanity as a whole*.[116] The membership in the community of humanity is non-optional in that one is never not bound by its laws; and more crucially, it is a community that necessarily includes both oppressors and oppressed as members. Therefore, the oppressors are subject to certain obligations—inescapable, unconditional, *moral* obligations—that the oppressed can hold against them for violating. The importance of this move, I emphasize, is not that it is a device for bringing the 'masters to heel,' but rather that it enables the oppressed to represent themselves as obeying a higher law that they and the masters are *equally* subordinated to, while implicitly gaining the satisfaction of feeling superior to the masters for

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[116] The idea of the universal human community already receives expression in Judaism. For instance, in Leviticus 24:22, "One law for you and for the stranger in your midst." And, in Leviticus 19:34, "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love the stranger as you love yourself." Lest it be assumed that this only applies to strangers within one's community, we also read in Deuteronomy 23:7 that, "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian because you were a sojourner in his land."

being obedient *at all* and the satisfaction of the aggressive drives by not being obedient *enough* (cf. BGE §219).[117]

This, we should note, also helps us explain the transformation in practices surrounding punishment. One of the reasons punishment for specifically moral transgressions becomes a more 'internal' affair, something that takes place between me and myself (and perhaps my priest), is plausibly because it becomes increasingly difficult for punishment to be externally enforced, especially so against the oppressors. The legitimacy and authority of a community's laws falter if the community or its lawmakers don't exhibit the power to uphold and enforce those laws (GM II: §19). If, however, the enforcement of punishment is invested in me, then the problem is solved—I punish myself for my own sins and transgressions, and I do that by making myself feel guilty.[118] Under these conditions, "bad conscience," as a form of *conscience*, also takes on a distinctively moralized or ascetic character. Reginster explains that "A bad conscience in this sense indicates a state of constant *moral struggle*, as when the agent is constantly tempted to go against the demands of his own conscience" (2021, 152).

In addition to this, the transgressions themselves acquire a more "internal" character too. In a *Nachlass* note from the period of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes:

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[117] It might be wondered, at this point, how the universality of morality fits into this. The distinctiveness of moral universality isn't in the scope of its evaluative judgments—in the "good"—but, rather, as Reginster (2021) has recently suggested, in the scope of its deontic judgments—in the "right." Morality involves a universal expectation of compliance with its commands. The nobles make universal evaluative judgments; they think the "weak" are universally bad. But they don't think the weak *ought* to be strong, they don't blame them for such a failure, and they don't expect them to live up to or by the noble's values. The nobles have a conception of rightness too, of course, but it is not universal; it does not extend to all humanity.

[118] Nietzsche suggests that another development in the history of punishment appears when the community becomes stronger and criminal behavior doesn't threaten its existence as it did before. In this situation, there's an attempt to "*isolate* the criminal and his deed from each other" (GM II: §10). The gap between the criminal and the crime creates a possibility for redemption or for restoring one's communal standing by 'paying' for one's deeds.

> The *law,* the thoroughly realistic formalization of certain conditions for the self-preservation of a community, forbids certain actions directed to certain ends, namely those that are directed against the community: it does not forbid the disposition that produces these actions—for it needs these actions for other ends, namely against the enemies of the community. Then the moral idealist appears and says: "God beholds the heart: the action itself is nothing; one must exterminate the aggressive disposition that produces it—" Under normal conditions one laughs at this; only in those exceptional circumstances when a community lives absolutely outside the necessity of waging war for its existence does one lend an ear to such things (WP §204).

The focus in the evaluation of the rightness of actions shifts from the external consequences and overt behavior to the internal motives and dispositions that underlie one's behavior (cf. BGE §32). This transition is at the level of the *content* of obligation—the ascetic character is deepened to include one's inner life and not merely how (e.g.) one treats one's body or others externally—but it is reinforced by the transformation in *form.* It is not possible for the community to enforce an obligation at the level of one's attitudes; it cannot forcibly make me treat Susan with respect, if respect is entirely a matter of one's attitude or quality of will rather than one's overt behavior. This, in turn, signifies also deepening of the demandingness of obligation. Moral obligation isn't just a matter of conformity to law; it requires that I have the right motive or maxim as well. The right motive is one that stands opposed to my merely 'subjective' or personal ones: my inclinations, desires, etc. That's why duty is *experienced* as *imperatival.* "The concept of duty," Kant famously writes, "contains that of a good will though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances" (GMM 4:397). There is something in us that *resists* the moral law, namely, the "counterweight" of self-love or happiness, in Kant's terms (GMM 4:405). The subordination of animal nature to morality's demands always remains incomplete; nature always looms and threatens to (re)assert itself. It therefore must be constantly suppressed, kept in check, monitored, criticized, beaten, tamed, and controlled.

The opportunities for guilt become boundless. So, Nietzsche writes, "We modern humans, we are the heirs of millennia of conscience-vivisection and cruelty to the animal-self" (GM II: §24; cf. GM III: §20; GS §78). At this level, "bad conscience" and guilt are almost phenomenologically indistinguishable from one another: to be *tempted* at all is to already be sinful and, therefore, *guilty*.

Let's pause to summarize the argument. The demandingness of moral obligation results from the merging of BCS and DCS insofar as the aggressive drives—specifically under conditions of oppression—are forced to turn 'inwards' where they latch onto the contractual concept of obligation. But, to achieve instinctual satisfaction, obligation must be violated, so that the agent can punish herself via guilt. The most efficient tactic to accomplish this is transforming the conception of obligation—which comes from DCS—in such a manner that will make it exceedingly *demanding*, hence guaranteeing its violation. This, as I have argued, is accomplished by subjecting obligation to the ascetic ideal. The content of obligation becomes ascetic; it demands that human beings overcome their own nature by subduing their natural dispositions and desires and engaging in acts of self-denial. This generates those "negative ideals" of selflessness, compassion, etc. (GM II: §18) as well as a conception of a God who is the most powerful *because* he's the most self-denying or the purest manifestation of life-denial as such, i.e., the most extreme opposite of the human beings who created him and worship him. The form of obligation must change too. It must become unconditional rather than conditioned by the subjective interests of individuals *or* the interests of the communities to which they belong. This transition, I argued, results from the needs of consistency with the ascetic content and the oppressive social conditions. You cannot represent yourself as acting selflessly if your reasons are conditional on your self-interest directly or indirectly via the

contingent interests of the particular (oppressed) group to which you belong. To obey the commands of morality thus becomes *the* mark of selfless behavior because the commands are unconditional and actively exhibit a subordination of one's self-interest via their asceticism, e.g., "I give all my expendable income to combat global poverty not because it is nice and I enjoy it or because it pleases me that it pleases others—to be honest, I would enjoy it more if I spent it on myself—but rather because that's what morality *requires* me to do."[119]

This, I think, finally answers the *morality problem*. The problem, recall, was that DCS left a gap between religious obligations and moral obligations. How does an infinite obligation to God relate to an overly demanding moral obligation? The problem becomes more pressing after the "death of God," or the decline specifically in an explicit Christian interpretation of morality. The addition of BCS to the genealogical narrative now enables an answer: moral obligation doesn't depend so much on God or the belief in one's debts to him as it does on one's internalization of the *ascetic ideal*. The aggressive drives employ this ideal in the construction of both moral obligation and the Christian conception of God. That's why Nietzsche denies that the "decline in faith in the Christian God" will yield a "considerable decline in human consciousness of guilt" (GM II: §20). He explains, "With the moralization

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[119] If the account I have offered of Nietzsche's view concerning the development of moral demandingness is correct, it's worth noting an interesting difference between DCS and BCS. In section 1, we saw that DCS—when considered independently—suggests that the demandingness of moral obligation results from an ever-increasing debt to ancestral gods and (eventually) an "infinite debt" to the "maximum God" of Christianity (GM II: §19-20). Nietzsche, recall, claims that this religious debt, the obligation of "repayment" via obedience, sacrifice, worship, etc., increases in proportion to the tribe's wealth, success, and power. The stronger the tribe, the deeper the debt. Yet, the narrative offered by BCS seems to suggest that the demandingness of obligation developed within a *subjugated, weak, and (originally) relatively fragmented population*, and not at all within a powerful, successful, wealthy tribe. The demandingness of obligation results from the obstruction of the need to discharge cruelty amongst these people. The debt 'grows' not because the tribe becomes stronger, but because there's an increasing need to discharge one's aggression; and, due to the oppressive social circumstances, this aggression can only be unleashed on the self. Religious doctrines offer the interpretive guise under which such discharge can occur, i.e., as an obligation to negate one's sinful nature. (See also May 1999, 58).

of the concepts guilt and duty, with their being pushed back into *bad* conscience, we have in actual fact the attempt to *reverse* the direction of the development just mentioned [i.e., a considerable decline in human consciousness of guilt]" (GM II: §21).[120]

Samuel Scheffler's (1992) discussion of morality's claim to overridingness is helpful here. For Scheffler, morality claims to be "overriding" in the sense that it is "never rational to knowingly do what morality forbids" (52). Scheffler, though, argues that overridingness is philosophically indefensible. But, he says, abandoning our philosophical commitment to overridingness doesn't pose a serious danger to what's really at stake: morality's authority in our psychological economy. Why? First, because morality is woven into the fabric of our interpersonal relationships and emotional lives, a phenomenon Scheffler calls "resonance" (68).[121] We inevitably and naturally acquire or form *some* set of moral beliefs; and we inevitably and naturally resist abandoning (some of) these beliefs precisely because of morality's resonance. Second, it's not a serious threat because we're instilled with a psychological capacity—akin to the Freudian superego—that already confers desire-independent authority onto moral considerations. Scheffler doesn't endorse the Freudian model, but he thinks it gestures towards a more sophisticated (and accurate) picture than the standard Humean model of human psychology. The Freudian model opens a possibility for distinguishing between

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[120] Kant, in his own way, recognizes this too when he says, "Even the Holy One of the Gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is cognized as such; even he says of himself: why do you call me (who you see) good? none is good (the archetype of the good) but God only (whom you do not see). But whence have we the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the *idea* of moral perfection that reason frames a priori and connects inseparably with the concept of a free will" (GMM 4:409). From the Nietzschean view, we might say that this is Kant recognizing—and misinterpreting—the primacy of the ascetic ideal.

[121] P. F. Strawson's account in "Freedom and Resentment" (1962) seems apropos here. For Strawson, the whole domain of the reactive attitudes—blame, praise, forgiveness, gratitude, etc.—is so intimately tied to human life and our relationships that it is unavoidable and, hence, also inoculated from the threat of determinism.

Humean "desire-based motivation" and a more Kantian "authoritative motivation" that resembles the unconditional force imparted by the categorical imperative (86). The authoritative place of morality in human life isn't going to suffer much even if people didn't accept the truth of overridingness, Scheffler concludes. Nietzsche, I want to say, is making the same claim but about God. People's allegiance to morality is not a matter of their surface-level beliefs about God's existence or even God's demands. It is a matter of their psychology and its structure—the values they've internalized and the role these values play in their mental economy.[122] Moralization ensures that moral obligation will have psychological efficacy even without a universal legislator who could enforce those obligations. This, however, doesn't mean everyone is *in fact* equally attached and committed to morality. The "death of God" suggests precisely that the commitment to morality is undergoing a process of rapid decay in modernity, an important claim I'll return to in the following chapter.

For now, we should also note that this Scheffler-inspired analysis helps us explain another puzzle, viz., why doesn't Jesus' sacrifice on the cross not relieve *Christians* of their guilt? If Jesus died in order to repay their (everyone's) debts, then they would have nothing to

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[122] Nietzsche didn't seem to appreciate the 'stickiness' of moral emotions and judgments sufficiently in *Human, All Too Human*. He writes, in HH I: §133, that "if the idea of God falls away, so does the feeling of 'sin' as a transgression … the depression caused by the pangs of conscience, the sharpest sting in the feeling of guilt, is … abolished when one sees that, although one may by one's actions have offended against human tradition, human laws and ordinances, one has not therewith endangered the 'eternal salvation of the soul' and its relationship to the divinity." Compare with GS §347: "Christianity, it seems to me, is still needed by most people today old Europe even today; therefore it still finds its believers. For this is how man is: An article of faith could be refuted before him a thousand times—if he needed it, he would consider it "true" again and again, in accordance with that famous "proof of strength" of which the Bible speaks." This passage might contradict the claim that morality (and Christianity) are largely dead, but it need not be read that way. Nietzsche says that most 19th century Europeans still *need* Christianity, but it's perhaps better to understand him as claiming that what they need is something to have "*faith*" in—some absolutely firm basis that could give their life a direction and meaning. This is needed most precisely when traditional sources of meaning have broken down for some reason or another. Cf. BGE §53: modern Europeans aren't liberated from the "religious instinct," which is even "growing powerfully," but they're refusing the "theistic satisfaction" of that instinct that comes from belief in God and traditional theological doctrines.

owe him in return. The debts would be paid off; atonement would be unnecessary. Forgiveness has already been granted. But Jesus' sacrifice is itself only a further move in the intensification of guilt, Nietzsche claims. This makes sense if we assume that Jesus' death isn't also the death of obligation. Rather, it seems to demonstrate the deepening and stretching of the asceticism of obligation to its ultimate limits. Only the death of the ascetic ideal could yield the final demise of *moral* obligation; and Nietzsche is quite clear that the ascetic ideal has proven to outlive Christian dogma (e.g., especially in the "will to truth;" see GM III: §24-27).[123] Still, I wouldn't want to deny there is an especially close connection between the ascetic ideal and Christianity. For that reason, it's plausible to refer to the contemporary hideouts of the ascetic ideal as those "shadows of God" that have yet to be defeated (GS §108).

2.4. Three (Further) Questions

Before continuing, I would like to address three important—yet frustratingly difficult—questions that the account I sketched still leaves open. First, the *excess question*. Moral obligation, I argued, becomes demanding (in part) because the oppressive circumstances create the need for the internalization of aggression. This aggression is discharged through guilt, which is facilitated by a demanding conception of obligation. But the guilt, Nietzsche claims, becomes infinite, boundless, or "existential" (Risse 2005). Why should it be so excessive? The aggressive drives don't *need* an infinite demand; they just need demands that are hard enough

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[123] If I am correct in this interpretation, then there's an interesting contrast between Anscombe (1958) and Nietzsche. Anscombe famously claimed that moral obligation is a category we ought to "jettison" from moral discourse because it only makes sense only a theological basis, i.e., if there's a "lawgiver," namely God, who could issue such commands. Nietzsche seems to suggest that God might not be necessary for moral obligation after all, which is one explanation for its continuance.

to accomplish so that they'll enable a sufficient degree of self-punishment via guilt. How then does Nietzsche explain this? The explanation must be the ascetic ideal. The excessiveness is buried in the ideal's total, unrelenting, all-embracing devaluation of nature—complete transcendence. As Nietzsche cryptically remarks, it is the "only" ideal humankind has had so far (GM III: §28; EH "Books": GM). The ascetic ideal seduces oppressed people partly because it enables them to attain the pleasure and satisfaction of the aggressive drives, those "instincts for freedom," in a social context that systematically thwarts their expression.[124]

But this answer only serves to raise the *origin question*: where does the ascetic ideal itself come from? Nietzsche's answer seems to be that it comes from the "priests" and their ancestors, the "contemplative types" (D §42; GM III: §10; GM I: §6).[125] These "inactive, brooding, unwarriorlike" individuals originally aroused contempt and mistrust from their communities due to their passive and strange behavior. Asceticism enabled them to remedy their socially precarious situation. By being severely cruel to themselves they managed to arouse "fear" (and, ultimately, respect) of themselves in others: for, "such an enormity of denial, of anti-nature will not have been desired for nothing" (BGE §51). Their emphasis on "purity," Nietzsche says, likewise leads to an ascetic, "anti-sensual metaphysics" (GM I: §6).

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[124] Elgat (2017, 103) has a different explanation. He thinks that there is "surplus cruelty" that is generated from social conditions—as society develops, there are more sanctions against the expression of cruelty and there are less opportunities to express it, e.g., on one's neighbors, and thus an excess of undischarged cruelty builds up (cf. Ridley 1998, 22). But while this can explain how the demandingness of obligation intensifies, it doesn't seem sufficient to explain how it becomes 'infinite.'

[125] But he also writes that "the entirety of asceticism" may have originated in the need to make a "memory" for the (forgetful) human animal (GM II: §3). The means for making such a memory—specifically, a memory to uphold and obey the community's basic rules—were "ascetic," painful ones. This doesn't contradict the other theory he presents, though. The contemplative types make special use of these ascetic practices partly because these practices are intelligible to other members of the community. The extreme or excessive use of these practices by the contemplative types suggests to other community members that the contemplative types are especially 'morally' sensitive or have a special connection to the gods, etc.

The priests are the people who benefit from the ascetic ideal the most: "The ascetic priest has not only his faith in that ideal but also his will, his power, his interest. His *right* to existence stands and falls with that ideal" (GM III: §11). This, note, provides additional support to answering the *excess question*. The excessive demandingness of moral obligation is incentivized by the priests' interests in maintaining their power and control over the disgruntled "herd." The ascetic priest "must be counted as the foreordained savior, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd" (GM III: §15). They maintain control by offering their flock their peculiar 'medication.'[126] The chief among these, Nietzsche says, is "exploiting the *feeling of guilt*," and he continues, in the Second Treatise "the feeling of guilt first confronted us in its raw state as it were. Only in the hands of the priest, this true artist of the feeling of guilt, did it take on form—oh what form! "Sin"—for thus reads the priestly reinterpretation of the animal's "bad conscience"" (GM III: §20; cf. GS §326). That is, the suffering of the oppressed is reinterpreted by the priests—via the ascetic ideal—as a "*state of punishment*" for their own wrongdoing (ibid). In this way, people are made to feel *morally responsible* for all their misfortunes. This 'medication' might alleviate or "anesthetize" some of the symptoms, but it's not a cure for the underlying disease.[127] In any case, the excessiveness ensures the continued dependency of the herd on the priest and, thereby, the priest's continuing authority. The *excess* of moral demands doesn't, then, serve the interests of the oppressed; they are as much victims of the priests as they are victims of the masters. Why do the oppressed accept the ascetic ideal, then? Nietzsche is not entirely clear. Here's one possibility: they take whatever 'medicine' they

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[126] I am *not* suggesting that the priests do this deliberately in order to maintain their power.

[127] See Huddleston's chapter, "Consecration to Culture: Nietzsche on Slavery and Human Dignity," in his 2019 book, for further discussion of the claim that morality doesn't necessarily serve the greatest interests of the slaves.

can get. They're not sufficiently reflective to recognize that they're being duped and they're not sufficiently creative to craft any alternative values, practices, or ideals than the ones offered to them by the priest.

The third question addresses an internal tension between the impossible demands that are imposed by morality and the principle of "ought implies can" which, according to Williams, is a key component of the "morality system," as we saw in Chapter 2. It seems unreasonable to blame anyone for actions or events if they "couldn't have done otherwise" to prevent those actions or events from happening. But, Nietzsche claims, this commonsense idea "is in fact a sophisticated form of human judging and inferring that was attained extremely late" (GM II: §4). The idea of freedom of the will—that one could have acted otherwise than one did—is employed, Nietzsche suggests, for the purpose of (a) blaming the masters for being strong, brutal, etc. and (b) reinterpreting the slaves' inaction as *willed* and *meritorious*, e.g., "I *could* strike back and be a master, but I *choose* to turn the other cheek because that's good" (GM I: §13). Morality, then, wouldn't command the weak to do things that they're not 'strong enough' to do; it would tell them they ought to do only that which they can do. So, how can this be reconciled with the infinite demandingness of moral obligation? One interpretive possibility is that Nietzsche is simply formulating tensions *within* Christianity itself. This isn't implausible, especially considering the naturalistic genealogical approach that Nietzsche employs. Nietzsche demonstrates how concepts or practices that seem like unified, singular, and "definable" wholes are nothing but "crystallized" composites of different, sometimes even contradictory, parts (GM I: §13). But then other times Nietzsche claims that Christianity is a "consistent" system (TI "Expeditions" §5). To resolve this, then, I would like to suggest another interpretive possibility: morality imposes impossible demands but presents them *as if*

they are possible, thereby upholding "ought implies can." It encourages the self-perception that it is possible and required of one to accomplish the impossible. Christianity employs the concept of immortality and God for these purposes. If the demands of morality are infinite, then I need infinite time to fully realize them and to attain moral perfection. This can't be guaranteed without the immortality of the soul, freedom of the will, and a benevolent God who safeguards the possibility of a moral world order—the final reconciliation between the "is" and the "ought."[128] Hence, these concepts also become postulates of practical reason in Kant's moral philosophy. These concepts, along with the principle of "ought implies can" itself, ensure that I don't let myself off the moral hook. And if, as Nietzsche claims, the point of Christian morality is to make people feel as sinful as possible (HH I: §141; D §87), then "ought implies can" should make them feel especially sinful and worthless insofar as it is wedded to impossible demands.[129]

3. Moral Demandingness in Contemporary Culture

As we saw in Chapter 2, one of Leiter's major critiques of Williams was that contemporary moral culture—which, Leiter claims, is Nietzsche's critical focus—doesn't involve a concern about an overdemanding conception of moral obligation. There is no one, Leiter says, who is really bothered by this bogey; it is only our bourgeois philosophers who feel compelled to

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[128] This is not to say, though, that Christianity represents *redemption* as something that's attainable to the individual through their virtuous activity alone. The doctrine of divine grace, predestination, etc. suggest otherwise. Nietzsche notes this point in GM III: §17.

[129] Note, also, that in D §87 Nietzsche claims Christian virtue is presented as something that "must" be achievable. The modal doesn't suggest that it *in fact* is achievable or frequently achieved.

discuss the issue at all. This, I think, is a plausible-sounding critique *if* one thinks explicitly in Williams' terms about moral demandingness. It is uncommon for people to think explicitly in terms of "moral obligations" or to deliberatively subsume their particular obligations under ever more generalized ones in a manner that enables morality's "domination" of their lives.

But once we switch to the Nietzschean genealogical account it becomes much easier to spot the contemporary cultural nooks where moral demandingness has burrowed itself. To see this, let's compare Williams' conception of demandingness with the Nietzschean one. In Chapter 2, I laid out the six features that, taken together, explain the demandingness of moral obligation, as it is construed by the Morality System. Here are these features:

1) **Ought implies can**: Moral obligation applies to actions that are under an agent's control such that, if an agent morally ought to A, then she *can* A (ELP 175).

2) **Overridingness**: If an agent is morally obligated to A, then the obligation overrides all other *non-moral* aims and considerations to not do A

3) **Inescapability**: If an agent is morally obligated to A, then her obligation to A is inescapable or doesn't depend on her contingent desires and preferences (ELP 177)

4) **Blame**: If an agent is morally obligated to A, then her failure to A will make her an apt target of other-directed or self-directed blame, i.e., indignation or guilt (ELP 177).

5) **The Obligation-out, obligation-in principle**: there must be some more *general* moral obligation that backs any *particular* moral obligation; and

6) **The "only an obligation can beat an obligation" principle**: a moral obligation can be overridden only by *another* moral obligation (ELP 180-181).

Nietzsche, we have seen, roughly shares Williams' views about (1)-(4). Moral obligation, he thinks, is unconditional or inescapable; it overrides everything that is non-moral, its authority stands independently of one's desires and preferences; and it is, of course, essentially tied to blame. What about features (5)-(6)? These features, recall, are crucial in Williams' account of demandingness. It's the push towards generality and the construal of ethical life as a whole in terms of obligation that leads to the accumulation of demands. Once I construe (say) the obligation to rescue someone in an emergency situation as a universal, agent-neutral obligation rather than a particularistic, agent-relative, context-sensitive one, then suddenly I (could) find myself almost necessarily in a situation where I am constantly violating moral obligations given the current state of the world. It's hard, however, to see where *Nietzsche* might accept such principles as part of his conception of morality. Indeed, it's the idea about the 'tendency' towards generality that makes Williams' account seem so alien to actual ethical life. Nietzsche's innovation, I suggest, is that he locates this 'tendency' not in the *formal* features of moral obligation, as Williams does, but rather in its *content*—in its asceticism—and the force of the "aggressive drives" in the use of that content. Williams doesn't address the content (or psychology or genealogy) of morality at all. He thinks that we can derive the demandingness of moral obligation from the formal features the "morality system" attributes to it. But Nietzsche's claim, as I am interpreting him, is that this demandingness owes as much to the content as it does to the form of moral obligation. The 'tendency' towards "generality" is the result of the ideal that's operating in the background, if only implicitly. Moral obligations slowly become pervasive in people's lives because moral obligations are essentially about suppressing the animal-self, which is *always* present. Williams and Nietzsche complete each

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other's accounts in this respect: *Williams reveals the form that makes moral obligation exceedingly demanding, while Nietzsche excavates the content that makes it so.*

From this Nietzschean perspective, it becomes possible to recognize the manner in which moral demandingness is still a live issue in ethical life. Consider for a moment all those things people are prone to feel and express guilt for today: race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, socioeconomic status, education, clothing, aesthetic preferences, dating preferences, dietary habits, the consumption of meat, the consumption of diary, the consumption of potentially non-fair-trade coffee beans, consumption *period*; guilt for one's family history, for one's failure to recycle, for driving too much, for flying too often, for ordering from Amazon, for buying from Apple, for not being vocal enough about social justice, for not protesting and marching enough, for not paying sufficient attention, for not *caring* enough, for not *doing* enough to fight all the injustices that undoubtedly characterize human life since its inception of earth and will probably continue to characterize it until humanity is finally gone. Nietzsche's words are apropos: "One will already guess *what* actually happened with all of this and *under* all of this: that will to self-torment, that suppressed cruelty of the animal-human … his *will* to erect an *ideal* … in order … to be tangibly certain of his absolute unworthiness" (GM II: §22). It is true, of course, that many people aren't prone to feel guilty about these matters. But there are many who do; and for them the failure to heed these demands signifies a deep moral flaw in themselves. This ascetic ideal, as unachievable as shedding one's animal nature and achieving absolute moral "purity," is a living reservoir of moral obligations in the cultural domain that—taken together—certainly seem to constitute a tendency towards the kind of moral tyranny and domination envisioned by Williams and so presciently diagnosed by Nietzsche.

If this isn't convincing enough, I provide in *Appendix I* a detailed analysis of a particular case: the contemporary 'antiracism movement' and, specifically, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (2018). This vindicates Williams' concern with moral demandingness as a real, living, cultural concern, even if it is only alive in some corners of society rather than others. Perhaps, I speculate, one reason Leiter denies that moral demandingness is a serious cultural problem is because his own thinking about the issue is colored too much by Williams' very form-centric and logical framework. In any case, once we turn to Nietzsche's framework, the variegated landscape of the contemporary manifestations of moral demandingness begins to unfold and reveal itself. This isn't yet to suggest that Nietzsche and Williams share the same *evaluation* of moral demandingness, though. Leiter's substantive claim about the Nietzsche-Williams schism is ultimately about that, not about whether demandingness is present in moral culture or is instead a mere philosophical ghost that haunts the journals of academic philosophy. That is the issue to which we'll now turn: Nietzsche's reevaluation of moral demandingness.

Chapter 4

The Reevaluation of Moral Demandingness

I have argued that demandingness is a central feature of Nietzsche's conception of morality. Morality—the ascetic interpretation of ethical life—does not *advocate* for self-renunciation, self-sacrifice, and the denial of one's natural instincts, it *demands* it *unconditionally*. The corrupt realm of the 'flesh' must bend entirely to the pure domain of 'spirit.' This all sounds very life-denying and, therefore, very un-*Nietzschean*. Indeed, the theme of "morality as anti-life" is one of the most prevalent tropes in Nietzsche's corpus, as I noted in Chapter 1. In one of Nietzsche's earliest works, *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1873), he writes, "to live and to be unjust is one and the same thing" (UM II: §3; cf. HH I P: §6; BT P: §5; EH "Destiny" §7; GS §26; TI "Morality" §1; WP §266, §897). This strongly suggests that Nietzsche, the philosopher of "life-affirmation," would be the severest critic of moral demandingness; that is, he'd reject moral demandingness as something bad. But appearances can be deceiving. Matters are rarely

otherwise with Nietzsche. Steven Aschheim's has shown that Nietzsche has been interpreted as everything from a socialist to a Nazi to everything in between from 1890 to 1990 (Aschheim 1992). So, if Nietzsche thinks moral demandingness is bad, we need to show why he would think so. That's the first question this chapter addresses: what, for Nietzsche, is the *value* of moral demandingness? And I will argue that Nietzsche can be plausibly interpreted as holding a more ambivalent attitude towards moral demandingness than the orthodox view would suggest.[130] The second question addressed in this chapter is: what's Nietzsche relevance to contemporary normative ethics, specifically the debate about demandingness? The answer to this question is closely intertwined with the answer I offer to the first question: Nietzsche's ambivalence.

I proceed by constructing three possible interpretations of Nietzsche's reevaluation of moral demandingness: (a) the *functionalist* interpretation; (b) the elitist *interpretation*; and (c) the *seduction* interpretation. I examine the contributions and limitations of each to our understanding of Nietzsche's reevaluation. I argue that the third interpretation illuminates Nietzsche's ambivalent view the most. It demonstrates sense in which the demandingness may even count as a good-making feature of morality on Nietzsche's view. After presenting Nietzsche's view, I proceed to address what I previously called the "Nietzsche-Williams Schism," or the affinities and differences between these two philosophers.

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[130] Nietzsche does, however, offer explicit arguments *against* moral demandingness especially in his early works. In *Appendix II*, I discuss and assess his objections in *Human, All Too Human* (1876). In HH, Nietzsche's arguments were mostly based on metaphysics: altruism is impossible, so moral demandingness is incoherent. Not all his arguments are metaphysically based, however, and it is those arguments that I examine in the Appendix.

1. Morality's Function

1.1. Reginster's Account

The first interpretation is based on Bernard Reginster's recent account of the argument of the *Genealogy* (2021). To situate this interpretation, it is helpful to engage first with Nietzsche's announcement of the new "challenge" in the *Genealogy*'s preface. In section 6, he writes,

> Let us speak it aloud, this *new challenge*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *for once the value of these values must itself be called into question*—and for this we need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted (morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as Tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as medicine, as stimulus, as inhibitor, as poison), knowledge of a kind that has neither existed up until now nor even been desired. One has taken the *value* of these "values" as given, as a fact, as beyond all calling-into-question; until now one has not had even the slightest doubt or hesitation in ranking "the good" as of higher value than "the evil," of higher value in the sense of its furtherance, usefulness, beneficiality—with respect to man *in general* (taking into account the future of man). What? if the opposite were true? What? if a symptom of regression also lay in the "good," likewise a danger, a temptation, a poison, a narcotic through which perhaps the present were living *at the expense of the future*? Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but also in a reduced style, on a lower level? … So that precisely morality would be to blame if a *highest power and splendor* of the human type—in itself possible—were never attained? So that precisely morality were the danger of dangers? (GM P: §6)

The importance of this passage is that it seems to illuminate three orientational aspects of GM:

1) **Nietzsche's Aim**: the aim in the *Genealogy* is to critique the unquestioned assumption that the (moral) "good" is more valuable than "evil;"

2) **Nietzsche's Criterion**: the criterion of value is roughly whether morality has been "useful" and "beneficial" to humanity—present *and* future—or whether it is/has been

a "danger to humanity instead;"[131]

3) **Nietzsche's Method**: the method in determining how morality meets the evaluative criterion is genealogy: examining the historical circumstances under which moral values developed and evolved, i.e., a genealogy of morality.

If this is correct, then the *Genealogy* can be usefully summarized in terms of two interlinking projects: (1) a *descriptive project* that consists in uncovering morality's history; and (2) a *normative project* that consists in using that history to assess morality's value. But, of course, we encounter here a host of thorny questions. For our purposes, the most important one is, how can the *history* of morality bear at all on morality's *value*?

Reginster's (2021) account offers an answer. Nietzsche's historical investigation, he claims, is meant to reveal the *function* of morality; and Nietzsche's Criterion is applied to this function: "morality is to be assessed in terms of its functional role in the "health" of the moral agent" (155). According to Reginster, the Third Treatise is where Nietzsche "most explicitly

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[131] There is need for caution here. It's not at all obvious what Nietzsche means by "useful" or "humanity" here. This is subject to immense debate. Leiter (2002), for instance, thinks he's only talking about "higher types." Richardson (2020) critiques Leiter for disregarding the more general meaning Nietzsche ascribes to "life" in his work. In any case, looking closely at the text, it seems that Nietzsche's criterion is formulated in *response* to the assumption that morality is of "higher value" than immorality *in the sense* that it has been more beneficial, useful, etc. to humankind. Who makes this assumption? Virtually everyone, Nietzsche seems to think, but it's reasonable to assume he has the "English Psychologists" in mind here—Darwin, Spencer, Reé—because they're the ones he immediately proceeds to criticize in GM P: §7 and GM I: §1-3. So, it might be thought that Nietzsche wants to show that morality fails by the evaluative criterion that these naturalists employ (often implicitly) in their own work: for them, the history of morality *attests* to its usefulness. Indeed, it wouldn't exist if it didn't prove to be useful to humanity. But there are reasons to doubt that Nietzsche's criterion is simply being borrowed from the English psychologists. For instance, are the English Psychologists interested in humanity reaching its "highest power and splendor"? If "usefulness" is determined in relation to *that*, then Nietzsche's criterion would diverge radically from the commonsense notion of "usefulness" that, I assume, operates behind the theories of the English Psychologists. The difference is further clarified when Nietzsche asks about moral values: "Have they inhibited or furthered human flourishing up until now? Are they signs of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or, conversely, do they betray the fullness, the power, the will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?" (GM P: §3; cf. D §106).

develops a functional *critique* of the moral outlook that emerged from Christianity" (155). Nietzsche's functional critique is thus directed at the ascetic ideal, which Nietzsche considers to be "a central distinguishing feature of the Christian moral outlook, [and] which also appears in its modern secular variants, though in attenuated form" (153). Accordingly, we must first inquire about the function of the ascetic ideal, on Reginster's view.

Here's his answer: the function of the ascetic ideal is to alleviate the inherent "sickliness" (*Krankenhaftigkeit*) of the human condition. Nietzsche, he notes, claims that humans—exceptional and unexceptional persons alike—have a propensity towards a "chronic" kind of sickness (GM III: §13). This results from the manner in which the "will to power," which Reginster takes to be a basic human drive, leads them to engage in activities that "exhaust" their "resources of strength and energy" (182).[132] The will to power is the drive to "impose one's forms" onto the world, internally and externally; i.e., it aims at bringing about the conformity between one's values ("will") and the world as a *result* of one's own effective exercise of agency. The satisfaction of will to power requires confronting challenges to one's will, for it is only through overcoming obstacles to one's goals that one can *feel* one's power and, hence, have any confirmation of one's agential effectiveness. Thus, humans are incessantly motivated to engage in increasingly greater resistances to their agency; and it is this that makes them "sickly." Nietzsche explains,

> Whence it stems this diseasedness? For man is sicker, more unsure, more changing, more underdetermined than any other animal, of this there is no doubt—he is *the* sick animal: how does this come about? Certainly he has also dared more, innovated more,

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[132] Reginster quotes Nietzsche's claim that every organism instinctively strives "for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power" (GM III: §7; see also BGE §13, §257; WP §728, §125; D §119).

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defied more, challenged fate more than all the other animals taken together: he, the great experimenter with himself, the unsatisfied, unsatiated one who wrestles with animal, nature, and gods for final dominion--he, the one yet unconquered, the eternally future one who no longer finds any rest for his own pressing energy, so that his future digs inexorably like a spur into the flesh of every present:—how could such a courageous and rich animal not also be the most endangered, the most prolongedly and most deeply sick among all sick animals? (GM III: §13).

In their incessant attempts to "impose" their "forms" on the environment, humans are bound to exhaust their finite strength and energy; they're bound to encounter obstacles that are especially difficult to overcome. This, Nietzsche says, inclines human beings towards a feeling of impotence and physiological exhaustion that threatens to lapse into "suicidal nihilism," a "will to the end." But, Reginster says, this is exactly what morality—the ascetic ideal, chiefly— is meant to combat: "The invention of the ascetic ideal … is designed to restore his feeling of power to the agent whose "exhaustion and inhibition" have beset with a feeling of impotence and threaten with "depression"" (183).

The ascetic ideal is the ideal of "holiness" (154). Holiness, Reginster says, consists in (a) the "devaluation of well-being" and (b) the demand for renunciation of our "natural instincts" (183). The latter, as we saw, isn't about the occasional renunciation of our natural inclinations, but their *total* renunciation. The satisfaction of our natural inclination is "*unconditionally* wrong" (158). The ascetic ideal thus signifies "a valuation of self-denial itself" (154). How does the ascetic ideal restore the agent's feeling of power, though? First, in revaluing his values, the agent transforms his will: he no longer takes physiological "well-being" to be valuable or good. "Good" now consists in the opposite: actively undermining one's well-being through the suppression of one's natural instincts. But, by revaluing his values, he thereby also transforms what counts for him as *power*. "Power" is now a matter of effective

self-denial, self-renunciation, etc. The chief means employed here by Christian morality, Nietzsche says, is the feeling of guilt and the interpretation of suffering as divine *punishment* (GM III: §20). The exhausted, impotent agent can reinterpret her suffering as a punishment for her sins, and therefore as something she brought on herself. But, for this to produce a feeling of power, the agent must construe her guilt as another way of realizing her values or "imposing" her will onto the world, i.e., meeting the obligation of self-renunciation of one's natural instincts.

The ascetic ideal therefore responds to human "sickliness" by *turning against life itself:* suppressing, condemning, starving, suffocating one's natural inclinations. Nietzsche writes,

> here [with the ascetic priest] a *ressentiment* without equal rules, that of an unsatiated instinct and power-will that would like to become lord not over something living but rather over life itself, over its deepest, strong, most fundamental preconditions; an attempt is made here to use energy to stop up the source of the energy; here the gaze is directed greenly and maliciously against physiological flourishing itself, in particular against its expression, beauty, joy; whereas pleasure is felt and *sought* in deformation, atrophy, in pain, in accident, in the ugly, in voluntary forfeit, in unselfing, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice. This is all paradoxical in the highest degree: we stand here before a conflict that *wants* itself to be conflicted, that *enjoys* itself in this suffering and even becomes ever more self-assured and triumphant to the extent that its own presupposition, physiological viability, *decreases* (GM III: §11).

According to Reginster, the ascetic ideal's attack on the "fundamental presuppositions of life" (GM III: §28) constitutes the core of Nietzsche's functionalist critique of morality. He writes,

> The aim of revaluation is to restore to the agent beset with a feeling of impotence the ability to impose his form on the world. Whatever imposing one's form on the world amounts to, it requires the very "energy" that the pursuit of the ascetic ideal depletes. Even the ascetic suppression of his natural desires requires it. Successful compliance with the demands of the ascetic ideal is therefore bound eventually to leave the individual so thoroughly weakened and depleted that he is no longer able to see even the suppression of his natural desires as an achievement, a demonstration of mastery or effective agency, and so to derive from it an increase in his feeling of power. By virtue

of weakening himself to the point where he simply becomes unable to prevent it, his continuing deprivation ceases to be something he *does*, and becomes something that merely happens to him—indeed, something he becomes powerless to prevent. When it is appropriated by the "will to power of the weakest" … the ascetic ideal proves to be destructive to life, and thereby to the very will to power that motivates its appropriation in the first place (185).

The practices the ascetic ideal demands—renouncing the satisfaction of natural desires—can't ultimately be fulfilled without the energies that it squanders in its attempt to fulfill that very demand. Morality, then, does not merely fail to address the "disease" it is intended to remedy; it makes the disease even *worse*: "it makes the sick sicker" (GM III: §20). Nietzsche thus writes that "The ascetic priest [by means of his ideal] has ruined the health of the soul wherever he has come to power" (GM III: §22). It is important, though, to note that Nietzsche's functionalist critique of the ascetic ideal does not commit him to reject all ideals (projects, etc.) that demand an excess of energy for their pursuit or accomplishment; it is not a condemnation of 'pushing beyond one's limits.' Nietzsche, in fact, values such endeavors. As Nietzsche famously says, "the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to *live dangerously*!" (GS §283). While the pursuit of "dangerous" experiments in living *can* lead to the catastrophic depletion of energy, living in accord with the ascetic ideal *necessarily* does so. That's the important difference. In one case, we risk ourselves for the chance to grow and develop and enhance our power, while in the other, we accelerate our physiological decline and decay. Morality therefore is certainly not "useful" or "beneficial" for *humanity* in general. It fails to meet the Criterion of the *Genealogy*. It doesn't promote anyone's health. Ultimately, it doesn't even allow itself to persevere.

That is Reginster's reading. Although it is not framed in these terms, it is easy to see how this reading amounts to a functionalist critique of moral demandingness. Reginster says

that, in order to restore the feeling of power to 'sick' agents, the ascetic ideal (via Christianity) makes "guilt habitual and inexpiable" (172). It motivates agents to interpret all of their suffering as punishment for wrongdoing. But, as Chapter 3 argued, that just means agents are motivated to construe themselves as *perpetual violators of the moral law*, and that is best achieved by an excessively demanding conception of moral obligation. Conversely, if moral obligation was not demanding, it wouldn't lead to the kind of 'catastrophic depletion' that, according to Reginster, constitutes the core of Nietzsche's functionalist objection to morality. The demandingness of morality functions as a means to restore the 'sick' agent's feeling of power by enabling her to view herself as successfully imposing her will on the world, even if, as Reginster claims, such imposition is ultimately self-defeating, makes the agent sicker, and increasingly *less* capable of imposing her will on anything at all.

1.2. Critique of the Functionalist Interpretation

The functionalist interpretation suggests that Nietzsche evaluated moral demandingness as "bad" because it is self-defeating or makes the 'sick' even 'sicker.' If that's true, it seems like a simple solution would have been available: make morality a bit *less* demanding. Here's an analogy: morality is like ice cream. Consume it in excessive quantities and you're guaranteed to develop cardiovascular disease. Morality, like ice cream, is therefore probably best enjoyed in moderation. But notice that this solution returns us to the original cumulative problem of diachronic demandingness. How do we determine when morality is demanding "too much"? Reginster's argument provides an answer: morality demands too much when it requires the sacrifice of one's "health." Yet this constraint still seems compatible with a *very* demanding

moral code. Consider Peter Singer's moral principle: "if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally to do it" (1972, 231). Singer argues for extreme demandingness on the basis of this deceptively simple, innocuous moral principle. The constraint that the functionalist argument introduces seems compatible with this, if we are entitled to read one's own "health" as being "morally significant." You shouldn't literally *destroy* yourself to assist other people. Singer can—and does—accept this claim, but, he says, that still requires you to do much more than whatever you're currently doing to alleviate the plight of the global poor.[133] I assume that Reginster would find this conclusion unwelcome.[134] The issue, though, is that the picture we get of Nietzsche's critique seems too partial. If Nietzsche would reject a vision of morality like the one offered by Peter Singer, the functionalist critique doesn't quite tell us why.

Perhaps Reginster could respond as follows: the functionalist critique claims morality is "dangerous," not that it is *necessarily* harmful. The danger of morality consists in its being exceptionally good at making agents "sick;" and it is exceptionally good at it because that's

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[133] Even Shelly Kagan (1998, chapter 5), who accepts the most extreme version of moral demandingness, claims that the point of morality isn't to destroy oneself through self-sacrifice. The point isn't self-sacrifice at all, but rather bringing about the best results. Exhausting oneself is unproductive insofar as the aim is to do the most good.

[134] Reginster could say that Singer's principle would still be essentially self-undermining on Nietzsche's view because it doesn't promote the agent's pursuit of "power" or "growth." As Nietzsche says, every organism always strives "for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power" (GM III: § 7; cf. BGE §13, §257; WP §728, §125). The reading of that passage has been challenged by Maudemarie Clark (2017). But, in any case, it seems to assume that power, for Nietzsche, is like a first-order, substantive good that one could possess. Power, as Reginster himself argues, is a formal notion—it depends on the content of one's particular values ("will") and their actualization (cf. Clark 1990). For instance, "power" for philosophers is a matter of being able to successfully maximize their activity of philosophizing, which, Nietzsche claims, is best achieved through *ascetic* methods (GM III: §7). This suggests that acting altruistically, e.g., in accordance with Singer's principle, need not undermine power at all. If one's goal is to help others as much as possible, then one is "powerful" whenever she manages to do so effectively via her own activity; and there's nothing essentially self-undermining about a principle like Singer's. (Note, also, that Nietzsche talks about the *feeling* of power, not even power itself, in GM III: §7.)

what morality is *supposed* to do. That is morality's function. Analogously, while there are many household items (e.g., a blender) that could be used to maim or kill, having a bazooka as a household item is especially dangerous because bazookas are designed to maim and kill. That is what bazookas are especially good at doing. That's what bazookas are *for*. Moreover, Reginster says, morality *incites* powerless agents to its self-defeating use (48). It incites by providing powerless agent with a much-needed means for expressing their *ressentiment* and "justifying" their situation, not to mention providing them with opportunities to take revenge against those more 'gifted' or happier than they are (GS §359; GM I *passim*). Accordingly, even a 'modest' moral principle like Singer's would nevertheless remain "dangerous" insofar as it can so easily be transformed into the unhealthily and excessively demanding form manifested by the ascetic ideal. It tends towards its own self-destructive employment.

Here, however, we encounter a different problem. If morality is "dangerous" in this sense, then it seems to be developing in the *opposite* direction from the self-destructive direction it supposedly tends towards. Morality is remarkably less ascetic and less self-destructive now than its historical iterations have been, when one could find "everywhere the whip, the hair shirt, the starving body, contrition; everywhere the sinner breaking himself on the cruel wheels of a restless, diseased-lascivious conscience" (GM III: §20). There's something obviously self-undermining about a moral code that literally commands self-flagellation, fasting, abstinence, etc. Yet it is decidedly less clear whether that's true of morality today, which, in many cases, is often explicitly *anti* ascetic. Who now would find a medieval flagellant anything but grotesque? Reginster admits that although modern secular morality grew out of Christian asceticism, it now only embodies this older asceticism in an "attenuated" form (153). Reginster continues, "In its modern secular variants, morality still allows well-being to be valued, and the

satisfaction of natural "instincts" to be pursued, though within the limits of what moral norms permit," but "[b]y contrast, the asceticism Nietzsche considers in the Third Essay is a much more radical form" (154). This, though, makes Nietzsche's discussion of a mostly dead-and-buried ideal quite curious, especially if his Criterion is (as we said) about the beneficiality of moral values for humanity's present and, especially, its *future*. In fact, the form of life idolized by the last man in *Zarathustra's* Prologue—the bourgeois life of comfort, small pleasures, professional activity, etc.—seems eminently healthy in comparison with the life prescribed by the ascetic ideal. (Recall, the last man doesn't quarrel because anger "spoils the digestion.") But surely Nietzsche's is much more worried about the rise of the last man than he is about asceticism making a literal comeback and leading us all to flagellate ourselves in the public square. Is he just issuing a mild warning against 'too much' morality, like an advert about the dangers of smoking? This analogy is itself too much—there are still a billion smokers in the world; you would be awfully lucky to find just one flagellant.

To summarize, the functionalist interpretation suggests that Nietzsche locates the badness of moral demandingness in its negative relation to "health." Roughly, morality makes us "sick" because it requires us to actively subdue our own nature—to annihilate the "animal self" altogether. Yet, Reginster's interpretation, I have argued, has a limited scope.[135] It can

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[135] Let me address a few additional problems. First, Reginster's account seems to fail to appreciate Nietzsche's claim that practices and values can have *multiple* functions or purposes. Multi-functionality seems to imply that morality can't be reduced to single function and then assessed *as a whole* on that particular function's merit. But Reginster is aware of this. He thinks Nietzsche does intend to attribute a specific and distinctive function to morality. Like other practices and objects, morality can "*function as* something other than what it was designed to do," but that doesn't entitle us to conclude that its current use has now become its function. I can use a fridge as a sock drawer; that doesn't mean the fridge was designed to be one. Still, if morality acquired new functions, it seems unfair to examine only one of them, even if it is morality's most distinctive one. Second, although asceticism is at the core of morality, it's hard to see how the functionalist critique extends to morality's central doctrines, e.g., belief in the "equal" moral worth of persons or even the demand to act selflessly. It's true that Nietzsche thinks compassion is an enervating *emotion*, but one can be altruistic without necessarily *feeling* compassion. Compassion fatigue is a known phenomenon; it doesn't conflict with doing good to others. So, the

help us uncover Nietzsche's opposition to the most extreme manifestation of moral demandingness, but it leaves the more "attenuated" secular forms of demandingness intact. It also, I have suggested, makes Nietzsche's own aims unclear. If the asceticism of morality is no longer a serious problem, then why would Nietzsche expend so much effort attacking it?

2. The Elitist Interpretation

1.2. Nietzsche's Higher Types

What other reasons might Nietzsche have to condemn moral demandingness, then? In Chapter 2, we encountered another contender, namely, Brian Leiter's interpretation of Nietzsche. Leiter's view, recall, is that Nietzsche's ultimate evaluative concern is with the flourishing of "higher types." These higher types are a small cadre of exceptionally gifted, creative geniuses, like Beethoven, Shakespeare, Goethe, etc. I argued, however, that if Nietzsche's concern was with the flourishing of these elites, then a demanding morality poses a much greater threat than an undemanding one would. Indeed, I argued that it is hard to see how an undemanding morality would pose any threat at all. This can now be translated into a critique of moral demandingness: Nietzsche claims moral demandingness is bad because it thwarts the flourishing of these higher types. This is the *elitist interpretation* of Nietzsche's reevaluation. And there is certainly textual support for this. Consider, for instance, the

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scope of the functionalist critique seems increasingly minimal. Third, Reginster doesn't address Nietzsche's complicated evaluation of sickness itself. He seems to suppose that sickness is just *prima facie* bad on his view.

following passage from the *Nachlass*:

> One should never forgive Christianity for having destroyed such men as Pascal. One should never cease from combating just this in Christianity: its will to break precisely the strongest and noblest souls. One should never rest as long as this one thing has not been utterly and completely destroyed: the ideal of man invented by Christianity, its demands upon men, its Yes and its No with regard to men. The whole absurd residue of Christian fable, conceptual cobweb-spinning and theology does not concern us; it could be a thousand times more absurd and we would not lift a finger against it. But we do combat the ideal that, with its morbid beauty and feminine seductiveness, with its furtive slanderous eloquence appeals to all the cowardices and vanities of wearied souls—and the strongest have their weary hours—as if all that might, in such states, seem more useful and desirable—truth, guilelessness, modesty, patience, love of one's fellows, resignation, submission to God, a sort of unharnessing and abdication of one's whole ego—were also the most useful and desirable as such; as if the petty, modest abortion of a soul, the virtuous average-and-herd man, did not only take precedence over the stronger, more evil, covetous, defiant, prodigal, and therefore a hundred times more imperiled kind of man, but provided nothing less than the ideal, the goal, the measure, the highest *desideratum* for mankind in general. To erect *this* ideal was the most sinister temptation ever placed before mankind: for with it, the more strongly constituted exceptions and fortunate cases among men, in whom the will to power and to the growth of the whole type "man" took a step forward, were threatened with destruction; with the values of this ideal, the growth of these higher men, who for the sake of their superior claims and tasks also freely accept a life more full of peril (expressed economically: a rise in the cost of the undertaking in proportion to the decline in the probability of its success) would be attacked at the roots. What is it we combat in Christianity? That it wants to break the strong, that it wants to discourage their courage, exploit their bad hours and their occasional weariness, convert their proud assurances into unease and distress of conscience, that it knows how to poison and sicken the noble instincts until their strength, their will to power turns backward, against itself—until the strong perish through orgies of self-contempt and self-abuse: that gruesome way of perishing of which Pascal provides the most famous example (WP §252; cf. BGE §228, A §3-5).

Nietzsche's worry is that Christianity (morality) seeks to "break the strong." Notice, he's not even concerned with Christian "theology," but only with Christianity's ideal and the influence it has on healthier, stronger types, who constitute the "higher *desideratum*" of humankind. Nietzsche's ultimate normative objective, on this view, would be to show these higher types that they need not occupy themselves with projects that aim at alleviating suffering or

promoting 'justice' for the oppressed, the marginalized, the exploited, and the destitute; and they need not feel guilty for not doing so. The suffering of the unexceptional mass of humanity doesn't matter or doesn't matter nearly as much as the higher type's own flourishing. This doesn't mean that the "herd values" of morality shouldn't govern the herd themselves. Nietzsche finds that perfectly acceptable. He just doesn't want those values to extend beyond the herd (WP §267). Nietzsche's task is therefore to *liberate* the higher types from the shackles of the herd and its individuality-destroying morality.

The elitist interpretation does enable us to see why Nietzsche would oppose and criticize a moral code like Peter Singer's, even if it didn't require the maximal abandonment and neglect of one's own well-being, health, plans, and projects. The exceptional persons, the higher types, need much, much more than just their health to realize their potential and to flourish as geniuses: Beethoven wouldn't have had time to write his symphonies if he spent his time serving the poor. The life of the higher types requires their full devotion of energy, resources, thought, time, and action to themselves and their projects. Their projects really are *life* projects, not mere hobbies. Nietzsche's view, according to the elitist interpretation, is that the badness of morality consists in drawing these people away from actualizing their potential; and morality does this (in part) through the imposition of its excessive demands.

2.2. Critique of the Elitist Interpretation

The elitist interpretation has an obvious drawback: it makes Nietzsche rather irrelevant to anyone who isn't a "higher type," i.e., almost everyone.[136] The unattractiveness of Leiter's reading doesn't mean it is incorrect, though. Are there reasons to think that it is?

Andrew Huddleston (2019) has recently raised some complications for the elitist view. The claim that Nietzsche seeks to 'liberate' higher types, Huddleston says, stands in tension with Nietzsche's characterization of the higher types themselves. For Nietzsche, Huddleston explains, "a truly great person will be able (or perhaps will have been able) to turn questionable and dangerous things to his advantage" (67). For a healthy person, "sickness can actually be an energetic *stimulus* for life" (EH "Wise" §2). The person who has turned out well has a "taste only for what agrees with him" Nietzsche says (ibid). Goethe, Beethoven, etc. certainly didn't really need Nietzsche to tell them to affirm life or avoid morality. They turned out well because they were already strong. The "bad air" of moral culture apparently didn't poison them. But, Huddleston says, this generates a dilemma for Nietzsche: "Either morality's effect on a person can be powerful enough to "stifle" or "crush" that person, thereby undermining his potential for greatness, or it cannot be powerful enough" (68). If the former, then that person isn't and wouldn't be able to be a great Nietzschean individual in the first place. He can't transform danger into something advantageous for him. "*If morality is successful at stifling a person, then* ipso

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[136] Perhaps, though, he provides a reason for ordinary people to promote the interests of the exceptional few? According to Leiter, Nietzsche doesn't intend to offer any argument for his normative positions at all. Nietzsche, he claims, is appealing only to readers with a similar "taste" as him. He doesn't offer justification for his normative views because he directs them to readers who are already amenable to them. The views themselves are as idiosyncratic and arbitrary as the views of those who are still committed to morality.

facto *he is not great*," as Huddleston says (69). But if morality doesn't or can't affect them, then morality is not a serious threat, and Nietzsche must have been confused in treating it as if it were one. The great person should flourish despite morality—if it doesn't kill him, it'll make him stronger (68). There were great individuals before Nietzsche, after all. They didn't need him. So, why would future ones need him any more than past ones?

The dilemma is compounded if we include Leiter's claim that Nietzsche is appealing only to those who share his "taste" rather than attempting to offer arguments in favor of the elitist view itself. The problem is obvious. If the higher types already share Nietzsche's taste, then why would Nietzsche even bother addressing them? If they don't already share his taste, then he doesn't employ the proper *means* in addressing them. It hardly seems sufficient to express one's preference for one set of ethical values in order to convince another to abandon their preference for a different set of values. People form deep moral commitments; they develop affective attachments to certain moral convictions and principles. These commitments also "resonate" (Scheffler 1992) throughout people's lives and in their relationships with others—they structure our interpersonal relations, public interactions, and our basic self-conception. They often inform, constrain, and even provide the content for our life projects and goals. If Nietzsche is trying to break people loose from *these* bonds, he must offer something beyond a mere assertion of taste or, as other scholars have suggested, aesthetic considerations. He needs to offer *reasons*, reasons that could be intelligible to agents who are still in the *grip* of morality.

Leiter does recognize this problem, admittedly. Nietzsche, Leiter says, thinks that the higher types are more susceptible to morality's spell than ordinary people are. But Leiter's explanation for this is inadequate. He quotes Nietzsche's claim that, "What distinguishes the

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higher human being from the lower is that the former see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear more thoughtfully" (GS §301). The fact that they "see and hear" more deeply and profoundly than others means they're more likely to take the values that proliferate in society seriously. Leiter says, "a thoughtless brute is hardly likely to worry about the morality of his acts … But the higher types that Nietzsche worries about are both likely candidates for critical self-reflection in light of moral norms and, at the same time, those for whom such norms are most harmful" (2002, 185). Yet that just returns us to Huddleston's dilemma. If the higher types are essentially "healthy and resilient" (2002, 118), then shouldn't they be able to recognize or feel intuitively that morality is harmful for them? Wouldn't they have a physiological aversion to it? Wouldn't their *instinct*s direct them towards healthier things, just as Nietzsche says he 'knew' atheism by "instinct" rather through rational reflection? (EH "Clever" §1). If morality is so "sick" and "harmful" and "life-denying," why would it ever become so attractive to people who are fundamentally healthy, powerful, and intrinsically disposed towards life-affirmation? If the "higher type" is truly higher, then it seems he simply wouldn't fall into morality's jaws; and if morality is toothless, we shouldn't worry about the higher type falling into its jaws in the first place.[137]

Still, Leiter is right to flag Nietzsche's preoccupation with higher types. Nietzsche was surely concerned with the flourishing of creativity and genius, so he'd naturally be concerned with the people who manifest these qualities the most. Here, however, another problem presents itself: is the demandingness of morality really all that *bad* for the flourishing of the creative types and, hence, for culture? The answer, I think, is that it is not *necessarily* bad. It can

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[137] For more on the "nascent" higher types, see Akshay Ganesh (2017).

even, for that matter, sometimes be good, i.e., it can have beneficial effects on the flourishing of genius and culture. The demandingness of Christian morality has inspired many artists; and although Nietzsche says that Raphael wasn't a Christian because "Raphael said yes, Raphael *did* yes" (TI "Skirmishes" §9), it is impossible to imagine his work—or the Renaissance itself—without the Christian cultural context from which it was born and within which it grew and developed. Huddleston informs us that even Beethoven understood himself in these fundamentally Christian-moral terms. In a letter from 1811, Beethoven wrote that "From my earliest childhood my zeal to serve our poor suffering humanity in any way whatsoever by means of my art has made no compromise with any lower motives" (quoted in 64). Indeed, Nietzsche himself wouldn't have been possible without the Christian-moral cultural background that shaped him. Perhaps these geniuses misunderstood themselves, but that doesn't mean Christian morality didn't play an indispensable role in shaping (and perhaps even partly constituting) their genius.

The elitist interpretation seems therefore to saddle Nietzsche with confusions. If he is critiquing moral demandingness *just* for thwarting the flourishing of a handful of exceptional human beings, then his project is pointless. Either (a) the people he's trying to help aren't *worth* helping; or (b) they don't *need* his help. Nietzsche's normative critique is therefore doubly irrelevant. It is irrelevant both to the unexceptional majority of humanity and the exceptional minority. For these reasons, it is worth examining whether there's another source for Nietzsche's reevaluation of moral demandingness that is available. Specifically, a source that isn't strictly elitist in Leiter's sense and doesn't fall into paradox. I turn to this task now.

3. Morality's Seduction

Nietzsche often claims that morality is "seductive" (see, e.g., GS §294, §338; BGE §33, 221; D P: §3; GM III: §11; WP §252). This claim is a key to an interpretation of his reevaluation of moral demandingness; and I will argue that this interpretation—which I'll call the *seduction interpretation*—reveals a more nuanced and ambivalent approach to moral demandingness. Nietzsche employs the idea of "moral seduction" as a method for reevaluation; it functions as a device that's offered to his readers for engaging in critical self-examination. This device reveals how the demandingness of morality can function in a pathological manner; but it also reveals the goods that, Nietzsche thinks, it has provided, chiefly: closing the door on "suicidal nihilism" (GM III: §28). First, I'll provide an extended discussion of the idea of moral seduction with a focus on GS §338. I'll then discuss how it facilitates a reevaluation of moral demandingness.

3.1. The Moral Seduction Experiment

The claim that morality is "seductive" raises an immediate paradox. Typically, when we refer to something as a "seduction," we mean to suggest that it conflicts with the dictates of morality; it conflicts with what one ought, all-things-considered, to do. To give in to seduction is to display weakness of will; it is to act against one's best judgment or against one's principles and commitments. To claim that morality is seductive is therefore to suggest that it draws us to do that which we *ought* not do. But that's precisely the paradox. Whatever 'morality' seduces us into doing can't *really* be what *morality* is telling us to do, because morality couldn't possibly

demand we perform an action that we ought not perform, i.e., an action that would violate our moral duty. Duty cannot demand its own violation. Thus, morality cannot be seductive. 'The seductive' is always the contra-moral. So, how should we understand Nietzsche's idea that morality is "seductive"? In answering this, I'll focus, as I noted, on a specific passage: GS §338.

In GS §338, Nietzsche uses the idea of "moral seduction" in order to conduct a thought experiment of sorts. I call this the *Moral Seduction Experiment* (MSE). Let me first reproduce the passage (or the crucial part that I'll focus on) and highlight some important features before explaining MSE. Here's the passage:

> How is it possible to keep one's own way? Constantly, some clamor or other calls us aside; rarely does our eye behold anything that does not require us to drop our own preoccupation instantly to help. I know, there are a hundred decent and praiseworthy ways of losing *my own way*, and they are all truly highly "moral"! Indeed, those who now preach the morality of compassion [*Mitleid*] even take the view that precisely this and only this is moral—to lose one's *own* way in order to come to the assistance of a neighbor. I know just as certainly that I only need to expose myself to the sight of some genuine distress and I am lost. And if a suffering friend said to me, "Look, I am about to die; please promise me to die with me," I should promise it; and the sight of a small mountain tribe fighting for its liberty would persuade me to offer it my hand and my life—if for good reasons I may choose for once two bad examples. All such arousing of compassion and calling for help is secretly seductive, for our "own way" is too hard and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, and we do not really mind escaping from it—and from our very own conscience—to flee into the conscience of the others and into the lovely temple of the "religion of compassion.
>
> As soon as any war breaks out anywhere, there also breaks out precisely among the noblest people a pleasure that, to be sure is kept secret: Rapturously, they throw themselves into the new danger of *death* because the sacrifice for the fatherland seems to them to offer the long desired permission—to *dodge their goal*; war offers them a detour to suicide, but a detour with a good conscience (GS §338; translation changed).

There are two features that we must emphasize about the passage: (1) for Nietzsche, the worrisome aspect of the "morality of compassion" seems to be its *demandingness*. More

specifically, he's clearly concerned about a form of *severe diachronic demandingness* that bears close resemblance to what I called Demandingness-L in Chapter 2 in my reconstruction of Williams. Demandingness-L, recall, pertains to morality's tendency to dominate an agent's life through a process of accumulation. In GS §338, the "morality of compassion" issues an unconditional command that we address (and prioritize addressing) suffering. But suffering, we're told, is pervasive: "rarely does our eye behold anything that does not require us to drop our own preoccupation instantly to help." Thus, we're overwhelmed by an ever-mounting number of cries for help, i.e., for *demands* that accumulate into seeming infinity and that threaten to crush the agent with their weight.[138] This suggests that (2) Nietzsche assumes his readers are *morally responsive*; they experience the suffering of others as making a *claim* on them. Indeed, Nietzsche says that's how *he* experiences the suffering of others. He's therefore not speaking to full-blown "immoralists," but to agents who are still under the grip of morality (or the morality of compassion).

Now, the MSE asks us to engage in an exercise of perspective-reversal. This involves two moves. It describes, first, the ordinary first-personal point of view of the moral agent, or, in brief, the *Ordinary View*. But then—and this is the second move—it asks us to examine the Ordinary View from an inverted meta-perspective, which I'll call the *Immoralist View*. Let me explain the details.

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[138] Consider the similarity with the following comment from Williams (1985): Once the journey into more general obligations has started, we may begin to get into trouble—not just philosophical trouble, but conscience trouble—with finding room for morally indifferent actions. I have already mentioned the possible moral conclusion that one *may* take some particular course of action. That means that there is nothing else I am obliged to do. But if we have accepted general and indeterminate obligations to further various moral objectives … they will be waiting to provide work for idle hands, and the thought can gain footing … that I could be better employed than in doing something I am under no obligation to do, and, if I could be, then I ought to be (ELP 181).

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From the Ordinary View it seems as if morality makes certain unconditional demands that conflict with our (typically) self-regarding pursuits, or what in MSE is called "one's *own* way." If we're sufficiently attentive to all the suffering and injustice that abound in the world, as I've noted, then we'll recognize that these demands are also highly *demanding*. The desires and preferences that beckon us to pursue 'selfish' matters, by contrast, will therefore appear to us as temptations or seductions that stands in the way of meeting these demands, i.e., of doing what we morally *ought* to be doing. That's the ordinary first-personal point of view of the moral agent in MSE. The demands of morality from this perspective appear as difficult and austere, but authoritative and legitimate, while our passionate pursuits appear as attractive and easy, but illegitimate and base.

From the meta-perspective—which the MSE invites us to occupy—the Ordinary View becomes inverted. The meta-perspective asks us to flip the ordinary point of view on its head: so, the authority and austerity of morality is transferred over to one's 'selfish' projects, to "one's *own* way," and the illegitimacy and ease that the Ordinary View attributes to one's 'selfish' pursuits is transferred over to morality's command, viz., the compassionate project of alleviating suffering and combatting injustice. For this reason, the meta-perspective is the *immoralist view*. That which is moral becomes forbidden; that which is immoral becomes obligatory. The MSE poses, essentially, the question: What if we viewed morality as the temptation, the seductress, that threatens to draw us away from our duty? What if our duty is to pursue our own task? From the Immoralist View, the agent inhabiting the Ordinary View is encountering a seduction whenever she experiences the cries of suffering as *moral demands* that override her dedication to her non-moral, non-obligatory projects. If, from the Immoralist View, (a) our duty is to pursue that which, from the Ordinary View, is 'selfish,' and (b)

seduction is that which diverts us from our duty, then (c) morality is seductive. The seductiveness of morality is, Nietzsche says, the seductiveness of *escape from oneself*. The seduction of morality is the seduction of *selflessness*. This doesn't mean the agent who is in the grip of the Ordinary View interprets his experience of or morality as seductive; rather, it's only the agent who's occupying the Immoralist View who recognizes it as such.

This, I think, explains the first important feature I highlighted above about GS §338, namely, its concern with moral demandingness. From the Immoralist View, demandingness is the seductive mechanism through which morality operates.[139] The demandingness of morality, from this view, functions as a means for preventing one from confronting her "conscience," or the voice of the *immoral* self, the "I," which wants to concentrate on its own ego-identity and ego-development. Morality doesn't allow this self to speak or grow or (perhaps even) develop at all.

How does moral demandingness accomplish this? That is, how does it manage to "seduce" agents from pursuing their "own way"? Scheffler's Features provide a helpful initial, though, as we'll see, incomplete explanation. First, it seduces by presenting itself as having overriding rational authority, which is registered psychologically by the agent as "moral duty." Nietzsche provides a naturalistic description of duty as a "fixed idea;" if something is thought by an agent to be her "moral duty," then she'll be disposed to treat it as "undiscussable" (WS §43; D P: §3, D §19; GM II: §3). It is settled. There's simply *no other option* on the practical table other than doing one's "duty." Second, moral considerations are pervasive, so there's no domain where morality is out of reach or 'not allowed' to enter. Its scope is universal. No

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[139] I don't mean to suggest it is the *only* seductive mechanism, though.

action or thought is beyond moral assessment. Third, the demands it makes are stringent; one must prioritize the interests of others above one's own. The stringency includes (fourth) certain deliberative demands—I am required to weigh various options of action and to engage in robust and difficult normative self-assessment, etc.[140] These features conspire together to ensure that the moral point of view doesn't just structure or set the bounds of a domain within which I can pursue my own self-interested projects, but that it has a strong potential to dictate the actual content and substance of the projects themselves. It is a cyclopic structure. The totalizing, hypnotizing, all-consuming character of morality transforms it into a very inviting means for self-escape.

Yet this isn't sufficient. Scheffler's Features don't really illuminate the seduction itself. It only designates the features that *appear* seductive. It doesn't tell us how or why these features acquire their seductive appearance. The concept of "seduction" includes another dimension that's not accounted for by Scheffler's Features: the affective-phenomenological dimension. Seduction typically involves the felt experience of the arousal of strong affects and emotions that (if heeded) threaten to undercut or overtake rational thought (or are interpreted as posing such threats). That is why seduction is associated so closely with sexuality. From the Ordinary View, sexual seduction can be especially threatening because it is so affectively powerful and often successfully overrides rational judgment or self-control (Schopenhauer WWR II: §44). If morality *is* rationality, then cases of seduction are apt to generate anxiety about one's autonomy more generally—one's self-conception as a being who is guided by reason rather than (non-rational) instincts, passions, drives, inclinations, etc., or the kind of mental

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[140] In this context, it's worth considering Kant's claim, in relation to the duty of self-knowledge, that "Only the descent into the hell of self-cognition can pave the way to godliness" (MM 6:441).

phenomena that appear in reflective consciousness when she's feeling "seduced." From the Immoralist View, morality exercises an emotional or affect-arousing pull on agents, but it's unclear how this manifests itself from the Ordinary View.[141]

Here, I think, Kant is especially helpful. Kant's discussion of sublimity in the *Critique of Judgment* offers a kind of phenomenology of morality that illuminates the seductive force that unconditional (moral) obligations can exercise on agents. For Kant, the (dynamical) sublime is concerned with the aesthetic estimation of power.[142] The sublime is a dual-sided experience. It is both exhilarating and terrifying. The terror that is evoked is prompted by the experience of a certain kind of *physical failure* in an encounter with (the representation of) an existential threat. The subject experiences the stimulus as something whose power it cannot physically resist or overcome. The experience of sublimity thus involves (in part) a sense of fearfulness, terror, powerlessness, and so on. So, the distinctive feeling of sublimity is a response to an encounter with objects in nature that are overwhelmingly powerful, terrifying, formless, vast, or incomprehensible: the vastness of the ocean, erupting volcanoes, jagged, snow-peaked mountains, and so on.

But, Kant claims, this painful experience of one's physical limitations is simultaneously also a *satisfying* one. Kant's explanation is that the contra-purposive objects of sublimity provide us with an intimation or feeling of the rational-moral "vocation" of the mind (CJ 5:262). As natural beings we are *dwarfed* by nature, but as moral beings we *transcend* it. Thus, Kant writes,

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[141] From more on Nietzsche's view on affects and their phenomenology, see Riccardi (2021) and Poellener (2007).

[142] Kant distinguishes in the *Critique of Judgment* between the "mathematical" and the "dynamical" sublime. The exposition I offer is of the dynamical sublime. There's no need to discuss the distinction between the two for our purposes, though.

nature is judged as [dynamically] sublime not insofar as it arouses fear, but rather because it calls forth our power (which is not part of nature) to regard those things about which we are concerned (goods, health, and life) as trivial, and hence to regard its power … as not the sort of dominion over ourselves and our authority to which we would have to bow if it came down to our highest principles and their affirmation or abandonment (CJ 5:262).

The distinctive exhilaration of the sublime—the feeling of our power called forth by nature—is explained through this connection with our moral capacities as "supersensible" beings. The ways in which the sublime object conjures our puniness, powerlessness, and fleetingness as natural creatures can only be offset by summoning up, if only implicitly, our infinitely greater powers as supra-natural creatures: as self-determining, autonomous, free, and rational, moral beings. For Kant, then, the possibility of the sublime depends on a certain conception of our agency, i.e., specifically as beings who can transcend nature by acting freely on moral principles. And that, as we noted, is exactly what's threatened when we experience something as seductive.[143]

From the Immoralist View, though, it is *morality* that is seductive. And the Kantian sublime provides the affective, emotion-laden, phenomenological dimension that was missing from our previous analysis of seduction. From the Ordinary View, morality's allure is in its illumination of the supreme value and unconditional worth of rational autonomy; it is an experience of the transcendence of nature, within and without, of the physical body and the material world, *via* one's moral "vocation." Here, I think, there's partial convergence between the Ordinary View and the Immoralist View. As Kant readily recognizes, the experience of

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[143] See Owen Ware (2014) for an exploration of moral phenomenology in Kant, which also draws heavily on the sublime.

sublimity is a feeling of (non-physical) *power* in the face of one's (physical) powerlessness. And, for Nietzsche, that's precisely *why* it is so seductive, and especially so for agents who are oppressed, weak, etc., who suffer precisely from a feeling of excessive (physical) powerlessness. Morality seduces by promising to lift us out of the crushing feeling of impotence that threatens to reduce us to despair. The encounter with the fragility of life, the vulnerability of embodied existence, the contingencies and luck inherent in one's social circumstances, etc. are all countered by the seductive thought that one's *worth* as an agent (a) stands infinitely above that of the phenomenal world; and (b) is under one's control. The overcoming of resistance to one's moral aims—chiefly, the suppression of one's 'selfish' natural desires and inclinations—thus becomes a confirmation of one's agential effectiveness (powerfulness) in securing the deepest values that constitute one's will.

And this finally provides a fuller explanation of why *demandingness* is precisely the mechanism that constitutes morality's seductiveness. The more powerless an agent feels, the more she'll tend to find a demanding conception of morality attractive, e.g., a moral conception which unconditionally demands a self-sacrificial life. The demandingness that the agent finds seductive is a reflection of the powerlessness that the agent implicitly feels. The most fitting exemplar of this conception is perhaps Jesus himself, who Nietzsche says represents precisely the "seduction" of moral values (GM I: §8). As Nietzsche says, one of Christianity's most profound and "sublime" paradoxes is that of "God on the cross" (ibid., BGE §46). The savior's seeming weakness is, in fact, the demonstration of his absolute strength; his omnipotence and mastery over life is demonstrated through the total sacrifice of himself for the sake of humankind, i.e., through living up the impossible demands of morality and thereby demonstrating his holiness. This also explains why Nietzsche construes the seduction of

morality as an "escape" from oneself. The agent is seeking to escape herself—her true desires, passions, or values—because she feels she cannot effectively accomplish or realize the goals that constitute her will, which is identified with the self. Morality enables her to interpret those desires, passions, etc. as temptations to 'sin,' rather than as reflections of her true self, and to interpret the negation or denial of these passions (etc.) as the triumph of the rational self over the sinful inclinations of her body. Interpreted through the Immoralist View, the agent is escaping from herself because her "own way" is "*too demanding*," in GS §338's language. That is, it's too difficult, too risky and uncertain, such that it arouses the anxiety that perhaps she's not *up to the task*. But, from the Immoralist View, the agent who succumbs to this escapist temptation is violating her genuine *(im)moral duty*.

3.2. MSE and the Reevaluation of Moral Demandingness

MSE, then, invites us to take up the Immoralist View. The question now is whether MSE also invites us to *endorse* this view? I mean: does MSE function as an objection to moral demandingness construed from the Ordinary View? The answer, I think, is that MSE is a critical device, but not exactly a critique of moral demandingness. Let me explain.

In *Beyond Selflessness*, Janaway (2007) claims that Nietzsche's rhetoric in the *Genealogy* is designed to arouse our affects. He explains that

> Nietzsche's project of revaluing moral values contains as an essential part the uncovering of a multifarious affective life beneath our moral judgments. By provoking a range of affects in the reader, Nietzsche enables the reader to locate the target for reevaluation, the 'morality' which comprises a complex of attitudes of his or her own, central to which are affective inclinations and aversions (96).

The arousal of affects plays, in part, a crucial *epistemic* role in facilitating the reevaluation. As Janaway interprets him, Nietzsche thinks that "[a]t the most fundamental level, we inherit not moral concepts, but moral feelings … acquired through unthinking cultural imitation" (46). Nietzsche, of course, also thinks that moral concepts and evaluations serve an affective function, for instance, alleviating the feeling of powerlessness and *ressentiment* in the slaves and priests of GM I. But, in any case, we late moderns have also inherited an affective attachment to these concepts, norms, and evaluations ("good," "evil," "duty," etc), and these attachments are, moreover, protected by a strong tissue of rationalizations that have been woven around them for centuries. In order to bring his readers to reflect critically on these values—i.e., to make the reevaluation of these values *possible*—Nietzsche seeks to arouse in his readers a *different* set of affects that could, potentially, detach them from their unthinking, overly-rationalized allegiance to morality. So, by exposing his readers to the origin of "good and evil" in the affects of *ressentiment*, hatred, the feeling of weakness, etc. as he does in GM I, Nietzsche aims to arouse his readers' sense of shame and disgust, Janaway claims. And, conversely, in describing the beautiful, powerful, active, happy, self-assertive warrior-nobles he aims to arouse our sense of awe and admiration, though also our moral horror at their violence and brutality. The arousal of the affects thus enables the reader to recognize a *mixed* and *conflicted* heritage of moral feelings and evaluations that are buried in herself. This is Nietzsche's perspectivism in practice: the more "affects" we allow to "speak," the more "objective" our view of something will be (GM III: §12).[144] The reader stands to gain enhanced objectivity

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[144] Cf. Maudemarie Clark (2015, chapter 12), "On Knowledge, Truth, and Value: Nietzsche's Debt to Schopenhauer and the Development of his Empiricism."

about her own moral inheritance via Nietzsche's arousal of her (supposedly) mixed affects; this, in turn, places her in a self-reflexive space where she can ask herself, "Do I wish to continue adhering to the system of judging according to the concepts "good" and "evil"?" (2007, 105).

The MSE, I think, functions in a similar manner. It is an imaginative exercise that opens a new self-reflective space through engaging a variety of affects and emotions that pull the reader in conflicting directions and prompt her to engage in critical self-examination. Indeed, Nietzsche describes his own "task" precisely as bringing "humanity" to engage in just such a practice: "My task, preparing for humanity's moment of highest self-examination, a *great noon* when it will look back and look out, when it will escape from the domination of chance and priests and, for the first time, pose the question 'why?', the question 'what for?' *as a whole*" (EH "Daybreak" §2). Nietzsche claims that this task grows out of his insight that humanity hasn't been on the "correct path," namely, morality's path (ibid). *But* there is no reason to think the result of this self-examination should be uniform for his *readers*, let alone uniformly against morality or the "morality of compassion" or its demandingness. Indeed, as I said before, Nietzsche is presupposing an audience that is (like himself) morally sensitive, not an audience of self-reflexively committed, full-blown immoralists, who have eliminated all trace of moral feelings and judgments within them. So, we must ask, what kinds of considerations would lead Nietzsche's not-yet-immoralist readership to choose to *cross* that evaluative threshold or to *refrain* from doing so?

One fairly intuitive answer is that Nietzsche's readers will be motivated to cross the threshold and become immoralists if they think that "escape from self" is bad, or if they think that abandoning one's own "task" or "goal" is normatively unacceptable. This doesn't settle

the matter, though, because it: (a) presupposes that I *have* a "task;" and (b) that whatever "task" I might have, it is *better* or more *worthwhile* than pursuing the demanding task that is set by morality. These considerations deepen the space of self-reflection.

In relation to (a), Nietzsche claims in *Daybreak* that most people don't even really have an "ego," let alone a "task" that could possibly count as the ego's passion or goal:

> *Pseudo-egoism.* — Whatever they may think and say about their 'egoism', the great majority nonetheless do nothing for their ego their whole life long: what they do is done for the phantom of their ego which has formed itself in the heads of those around them and has been communicated to them; —as a consequence they all of them dwell in a fog of impersonal, semi-personal opinions, and arbitrary, as it were poetical evaluations, the one for ever in the head of someone else, and the head of this someone else again in the heads of others: a strange world of phantasms … [N]o individual among this majority is capable of setting up a real ego, accessible to him and fathomed by him, in opposition to the general pale fiction and thereby annihilating it (D §105).[145]

In the case of most people, the ego is a "phantom." This, note, shouldn't be understood in a metaphysical sense, e.g., like Nietzsche's rejection of the "will" as a unitary faculty (BGE §19). It is, I think, rather about the character of one's psychological constitution, its uniqueness, and one's propensity towards or capacity for self-assertion and value-creation. These people aren't capable of genuine "originality" or "style" (GS §290). They might have a consistent and even "reputable" character, but it'll still be a pseudo-character that receives its substance from the praise that others heap on it due to its *usefulness* to them and society (GS §296; cf. GS §21).

This suggests an interpretation of GS §338 that resurrects the specter of elitism. If the majority of humans have no genuine ego and no task, it's easy to assume that Nietzsche is only addressing *exceptional* people who do have an ego and task. GS §338 does indeed suggest this:

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[145] Cf. WP §881: "Most men represent pieces and fragments of man: one has to add them up for a complete man to appear."

the "noblest people" are especially eager to escape from their "goal," Nietzsche says. Yet, I think there are grounds for doubt, too. Nietzsche often emphasizes the ineffability and incommunicability of that which is truly "personal" in *everyone*: "Fundamentally, all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual … [b]ut as soon as we translate them into consciousness *they no longer seem to be*" (GS §354; cf. UM III: §1; D §116; GS §335).[146] This, I think, suggests that Nietzsche thought the *material* for genuine ego-formation is available to just about everyone, even if (as a matter of fact) just about everyone lacks the courage, awareness, and motivation to *actually* form one. If the exceptional person has a "task" that's highly tailored to their individual nature, the unexceptional pseudo-person has the "task" of *discovering* their individual nature so that they may then *become* genuine individuals by creating "an ideal of [their] own" (GS §335; cf. D §61). MSE therefore isn't necessarily intended to exclude 'average natures' from engaging in serious self-examination and reevaluation.[147]

But here (b) becomes important. How can I be certain my own task is worthwhile? How do I know *I* am worth investing in myself? Nietzsche claims that, "Selfishness is worth only as much as the physiological value of the selfish person: it can be worth a lot or it can be worthless and despicable" (TI "Skirmishes" §33). Or, in Zarathustra's words, "Your dominant

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[146] In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche puts it in even stronger words: "In individual moments we all know how the most elaborate arrangements of our life are made only so as to flee from the tasks we actually ought to be performing" (UM III: §5).

[147] Nietzsche seems remarkably close to Mill here. Mill, in *On Liberty*, writes that, "It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works of human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant ailment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others" (p. 52).

thought I want to hear, and not that you have escaped from a yoke. Are you one of those who had the *right* to escape from a yoke? There are some who threw away their last value when they threw away their servitude" (Z I: 17). Of course, Nietzsche might have his own standard of evaluation here, but in MSE, each person is invited to reflect on their own selfishness and its worth. Thus Nietzsche's "morality"—which he doesn't force or recommend to others—says to *him*, "Live in seclusion so that you *can* live for yourself. Live in *ignorance* about what seems most important to your age" (GS §338). The trouble, though, is that doubts about one's self-worth and/or the value of one's "task" aren't even remotely uncommon, and that makes "escaping from oneself" via moral demandingness so seductive, and *detrimentally* so, if one's talents are "squandered" (WP §367). That's enough to trigger compassion from Nietzsche himself: "*My kind of "pity."* — … I sense it when I see precious capabilities squandered … Or wben I see anyone halted, as a result of some stupid accident, at something less than he might have become. Or especially at the idea of the lot of mankind, as when I observe with anguish and contempt to politics of present-day Europe, which is, under all circumstances, also working at the web of the future of *all* men" (ibid).

I want to argue, though, that the badness of "escaping" through the demandingness of morality isn't merely that the person (or humanity) loses out on personal self-development and the enrichment of individual life, but also—much more interestingly—because it risks debasing or corrupting morality from the Ordinary View as well. That is, MSE, by inviting the reader to imaginatively adopt the Immoralist View, can lead the reader back to inhabiting the Ordinary View in a more authentic, honest, refined way. It can do that because, as I'll show, it enables us to identify what I call *pathological* forms of moral demandingness. The crucial point is that MSE can offer considerations that may lead us to reject the *Immoralist View*, but in a

manner that transforms how we inhabit or return to the *Ordinary View*. This is a subtle thought, so I'll slow down.

First, Nietzsche suggests that even the pseudo-individuals who constitute the mass of humans are sometimes (*en masse*) in urgent need of self-escape. Escape, in their case, is needed especially from the void that is the (pseudo-) "I" and its emptiness and meaninglessness; and the need for such escape is especially acute in ages where traditional sources of meaning are undergoing decay. Thus, Nietzsche writes,

> Faith is always needed most and needed most urgently where will is lacking; for will, as the affect of command, is the decisive sign of sovereignty and strength. In other words, the less one knows how to command, the more urgently one covets someone who commands, who commands severely—a god, prince, class, physician, father confessor, dogma, or party conscience. From this one might perhaps gather that the two world religions, Buddhism and Christianity, may have owed their origin and above all their sudden spread to a tremendous collapse and *disease of the will.* And that is what actually happened: both religions encountered a situation in which the will had become diseased, giving rise to a demand that had become utterly desperate for some "thou shalt" (GS §347).

In BGE §199, Nietzsche claims that "considering … that nothing has been exercised and cultivated better and longer among men so far than obedience—it may fairly be assumed that the need for it [i.e., for obedience] is now innate in the average man, as a kind of *formal conscience* that commands: "thou shalt unconditionally do something, unconditionally not do something," in short, "thou shalt."" Whenever there's a lack of a *commanding* voice, people thus confront the emptiness of their 'formal conscience.' The 'diseased' agent needs to will *something*, or, rather, needs to fill the substance of his own will with the substance of the will of another. So that, in the case of late-modern Europeans, "the appearance of one who commands unconditionally strikes these herd-animals as an immense comfort and salvation from a

gradually intolerable pressure [i.e., the pressure of commanding]" (ibid). It is here, I will argue,

that pathological forms of moral demandingness are primed to develop. One such pathological

form is a morality that centers around evoking feelings of *moral guilt*, as Nietzsche accuses

Christianity of doing in GM II. The reason I think it is a pathology or corruption of morality,

as construed from the Ordinary View, is because it enlists the demandingness of morality in

order to remain passive in the face of the suffering and injustice that the agent is precisely

being called to address. The agent avoids the demand to alleviate suffering or confront

injustice because it's just "*too demanding.*" Instead, she withdraws into herself and 'atones' for

her inaction through excessive self-punishment, i.e., guilt, which she misconstrues as another

way of living up to morality's excessive demands. I call this the *confessional pathology*. I think that

an excellent example of this is afforded by Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (2018), which I

examine in *Appendix I*. Here, I will explore in more detail two other pathologies: (1) the *barbaric*

pathology; and (2) the *servility pathology*.

The *barbaric pathology* can be classified as a form of "fanaticism," to use Nietzsche's

vocabulary.[148] In GS §347, Nietzsche, continuing from where my quotation above ended,

writes that "Both religions [Christianity and Buddhism] taught fanaticism in ages in which the

will had become exhausted, and thus they offered innumerable people some support, a new

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[148] Riccardi (2021) explores the idea of "fanaticism," as does Reginster (2003). The kind of fanaticism they
emphasize is epistemological, but I think that even the epistemological kind of fanaticism is moral, on Nietzsche's
view, and indeed, involves a kind of pathological form of moral demandingness. This becomes very clear in
Nietzsche's critique of the "free spirits" and their commitment to the ascetic ideal in GM III: §23-27. Nietzsche's
point is that these free spirits are fanatically committed to "truth," but their pursuit is also guided by an "escape
from self," which manifests in the demandingness of their task: the demandingness consists in sacrificing all the
comforting lies and illusions that human beings have offered for themselves as a solution to the problem of
meaning. Unbeknownst to them, they're killing God in God's name.

possibility of willing, some delight in willing." The distinctive trait of fanaticism, he continues, is that it consists in a "sort of hypnotism of the whole system of the senses and the intellect for the benefit of an excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling that henceforth becomes dominant." The "thou shalt" that's inserted into the formal conscience of the individual 'dominates' his psyche; and it dominates *at the expense* of other possible drives and affects and their 'points of view,' their demands, and their aims. The *barbaric pathology* involves cases where the demandingness of morality is invoked as a means of barbarism. Himmler's speeches to S.S. commanders and *Einsatzgruppen*—the units that massacred Jews and others by gunpoint mostly in the Eastern Front in WW2—serves as the most instructive example. Here's Hannah Arendt's (1963) chilling description:

> The member of the Nazi hierarchy most gifted at solving problems of conscience was Himmler. He coined slogans, like … "These are battles which future generations will not have to fight again," alluding to the "battles" against women, children, old people, and other "useless mouths." Other such phrases, taken from speeches Himmler made to the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Higher S.S. and Police Leaders, were: "To have stuck it out and, apart from exceptions caused by human weakness, to have remained decent, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written." Or: "The order to solve the Jewish question, this was the most frightening order an organization could ever receive." Or: We realize that what we are expecting from you is "superhuman," to be "superhumanly inhuman." All one can say is that their expectations were not disappointed. It is noteworthy, however, that Himmler hardly ever attempted to justify in ideological terms, and if he did, it was apparently quickly forgotten. What stuck in the minds of these men who had become murderers was simply the notion of being involved in something historic, grandiose, unique ("a great task that occurs once in two thousand years"), which must therefore be difficult to bear. This was important, because the murderers were not sadists or killers by nature; on the contrary, a systematic effort was made to weed out all those who derived physical pleasure from what they did. The troops of the *Einsatzgruppen* had been drafted from the Armed S.S., a military unit with hardly more crimes in its record than any ordinary unit of the German Army, and their commanders had been chosen by Heydrich from the S.S. elite with academic degrees. Hence the problem was how to overcome not so much their conscience as the animal pity by which all normal men are affected in the presence of physical suffering. The trick used by Himmler - who apparently was rather strongly afflicted with these instinctive

reactions himself - was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them toward the self. So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders! (105-6)

Himmler's "trick," as Arendt calls it, can be redescribed as reinterpreting the horrendous actions one has committed through the lens of morality's demandingness. Self-denial is crucial here; doing one's moral duty shouldn't be a pleasant affair. It requires combatting one's natural inclinations and instincts; it is sublime self-transcendence. It is typically assumed that fanaticism *leads* one to the adoption of extreme—and often extremely demanding—doctrines or worldviews. But the *barbaric pathology* demonstrates that demandingness is something that can *reinforce*, perhaps even *generate*, fanaticism.[149] In being ordered to commit unconscionable crimes, the need to escape from a confrontation with their conscience (the voice of one's 'true' self) motivates a reinterpretation of their actions as supremely moral; "I wouldn't have done that, if it wasn't an unconditional requirement, something of absolute moral worth; and I *know* it must've been that because otherwise it wouldn't have been so *difficult* and *painful* to do."[150] The barbarian sacrifices or excises whole parts of his nature in order to feed and preserve another part, i.e., his weak, atrophied, "will," which cannot face itself and therefore needs a "thou shalt" from above to which he can submit and obey.[151] The barbarism of one's actions

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[149] In this context, Nietzsche's claim in GS §324 is especially foreboding: "not to perish of internal distress and uncertainty when one inflicts great suffering and hears the cry of this suffering—that is great, that belongs to greatness." But I don't think that Nietzsche is referring to *violence* here. In the *Gay Science*, I think that most references to "suffering" and "distress" are related more to psychological anguish. Nietzsche tends to emphasize these precisely when talking about an individual's need to find for himself a "task" (see, e.g., §302, §338).

[150] Nietzsche emphasizes this element precisely in the *German* moral tradition. See, e.g., D P: §3, D §207, D §339; GS §5; BGE §187, BGE §188.

[151] See, again, D §207: "A German is capable of great things, but it is improbable he will do them: for … he obeys *whenever he can* …. Whenever a German did anything great he did it because he was obliged to do it … Now, if a

and the painfulness of one's conscience are crucial components in motivating and proving one's devotion to a supreme *moral* endeavor.[152]

Although the *barbaric pathology* isn't something we find explicitly in Nietzsche's texts[153], he does discuss an adjacent problem: demagoguery and authoritarianism. In GS §149, he says that

> The more general and unconditional the influence of an individual or the idea of an individual can be, the more homogeneous and the lower must the mass be that is influenced, while counter-movements give evidence of counter-needs that also want to be satisfied and recognized. Conversely, we may always infer that a civilization is really high when powerful and domineering natures have little influence and create only sects. This applies also to the various arts and the field of knowledge. Where someone rules, there are masses: and where we find masses we also find a need to be enslaved. Where men are enslaved, there are few individuals, and these are opposed by herd instincts and conscience (GS §149; cf. GS §40).

Nietzsche's comment suggests that civilizations where demagoguery isn't present are 'higher' because they contain more *individuated* persons. This, again, doesn't mean Nietzsche harbors any great hope that the 'herd' will ever overcome its pseudo-egoism and become "original." But that doesn't mean MSE can't provide the kinds of considerations that could lead them to inhabit the Ordinary View in a more critical, self-reflexive manner that would enable them to avoid falling under the spell of demagogues or into barbarism. That is, MSE could lead one to

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nation of this sort concerns itself with morality, what morality will it be that will satisfy it? The first thing it will certainly require is that in this morality its heartfelt inclination to obedience shall appear idealized. 'Man has to have something which he can *obey unconditionally*' … the basis of all German teaching."

[152] So, Nietzsche writes, "Cruelty is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind … and thus there creeps into the world the idea that *voluntary suffering*, self-chosen torture is meaningful and valuable … for to practice cruelty is to enjoy the highest gratification of the feeling of power. Thus the concept of the 'most moral man' of the community came to include the virtue of the most frequent suffering, of privation, of the hard life, of cruel chastisement" (D §18). And, in the same book: "Did the hitherto most moral man [i.e., Jesus] not entertain the belief that the only justified condition of mankind in the face of morality was the *profoundest misery*?" (D §106)

[153] GS §13 comes close, though.

take up "morality's way" *as* "one's *own* way." This thought leads us into the third form of pathological moral demandingness: *servility.*

The *servility pathology* refers to cases where the demandingness of morality is employed as a means of maintaining one's own servility. Although, in the Nietzschean context, this is prone to evoke thoughts about powerful 'higher men' who debase themselves by becoming the subservient tools of the 'herd,' I am thinking here specifically of socially marginalized classes: groups who are systematically oppressed and, hence, powerless. Nietzsche doesn't typically demonstrate much concern for these groups, but—assuming he cared about the flourishing of genius—he probably should have. As Stephen Jay Gould famously said, "I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convulsions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops" (1992, 151). The oppression of entire classes of people—historically and presently—undoubtedly constitutes an unfathomable level of 'squandering' of talent, creativity, and human potential, if anything ever did. A particular mechanism that's employed in this kind of oppression is a psychological one: oppressed classes are psychologically trained to participate in their own oppression, e.g., to experience their subservience, marginalization, and exclusion as good or justified or beneficial, or to feel bad if they're *not* fulfilling their subservient role, or to associate their worth as persons with servility to their oppressors, etc. These psychological features don't just function as mechanisms for merely maintaining and protecting the oppressive structure, but also for *maximizing* the exploitation that's involved in their oppression for the benefit of those who control it.

A paradigmatic example, of course, is gender-based oppression. The standard 'virtues' associated with women are *prima facie* self-sacrificial, demanding virtues: the interests of

husband and children must precede that of the wife and mother, etc. Susan Moller Okin writes that, "in virtually all human societies, women do far more than men to promote the day-to-day material and psychological flourishing of others and … and this promotion of the flourishing of others is not infrequently done at the expense of some aspects of their own flourishing" (1996, 227). And, as Sandra Barky (2002, cf. 1990) argues, even the seemingly 'self-regarding virtues' of femininity are highly demanding. There is enormous social pressure to look and behave 'like a proper woman,' e.g., to engage in time-and-energy-consuming beauty regiments of austere dieting, intensive exercise, expensive cloth-shopping, makeup application, etc. Of course, if one can't or won't engage in these practices, then social *institutions* will often punish her for it—e.g., it'll impact her job prospects, her capacity to attract a partner, and even the likelihood of forming friendships and bonding with other women (ibid). And if one's *character* is formed under the influence of oppressive values and norms, then they'll have a strong presence in one's mental economy, *even if* social institutions are subjected to reform (see Tessman 2005).

This is a pathological form of moral demandingness not just because it diminishes the agent's flourishing and potential, but—as with the *barbaric pathology*—because it makes a virtue out of an injustice (i.e., one's socially enforced servility) and uses moral demandingness as its mechanism for doing so. So, for instance, Bartky argues that the demanding nature of "normative femininity" and its beauty regiments provides its practitioners with a feeling of "mastery" such that "any suggestion…that the disciplines weren't worth the trouble it took to acquire them may well bring or resentment as well as the resistance of any artisan to de-skilling" (2002, 24). Feminine beauty may actually provide "the most power a woman will ever exert, at in her dealings with other adults" (ibid). It also "addresses our [women's] narcissistic

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needs" while "at the same time covertly assaults our narcissism, creating a sense of lack that only its products can fill" (ibid).

I am not claiming that oppressed and marginalized people are ever blameworthy for the *servility pathology*, of course. The traits I have in mind often serve as "survival mechanisms" under oppressive circumstances (Tessman 2005, 19). The point, rather, is that, from the *Immoralist View* of MSE, one can be led to see these virtues *as* pathological, as a (socially enforced) "escape" from the self. In the case of the *barbaric pathology*, MSE can lead one to take up morality's other-regarding aspects as "one's *own* way;" but in the case of the *servility pathology*, MSE can lead one to take "one's *own* way" as *morality's way*. That is, MSE reveals in this case the priority of self-regarding duties from the Ordinary View. It can, in other words, ensure that "your love of the neighbor" won't just be "your bad love of yourselves" (Z I: 16). MSE importantly also reveals the *demandingness* of these self-regarding duties. If living up to the faux duties of servility is demanding, then MSE demonstrates how much more demanding resisting them can be, e.g., resisting normative femininity can cost one her job, family, friends, etc. The draw of succumbing to one's oppression, to the easy and socially acceptable joy of being a *function* for the welfare and interests of others (see GS §119, §296) constitutes a real seduction. As Zarathustra says, "delight in the herd is more ancient than the delight in the ego; and as long as the good conscience is identified with the herd, only the bad conscience says: I" (Z I: 15). The norms and values that proliferate in the oppressive cultural milieu may become so deeply ingrained in the oppressed person's psyche, that overcoming them may be "*too demanding*" (GS §338) indeed, but much more worthwhile, nevertheless. (Cf. Thomas Hill 1973).

So, to summarize, Nietzsche's MSE is offered as a critical device for self-examination. It functions by arousing affects that draw us in opposing directions. The exercise can lead the reader to recognize that she is indeed escaping from herself *through* the demandingness of morality, but it need not, I've claimed, lead her to abandon morality or its demandingness, and to cross the evaluative threshold into immoralism instead, as I put it before. This, however, leaves us with an open question: what is *Nietzsche's* assessment of moral demandingness? Should the discussion lead us to conclude moral demandingness, on Nietzsche's view, is bad *tout court*? I don't think so at all. Let me, in closing, explain why.

First, it's clear that normative demandingness *as such* is certainly not bad on Nietzsche's view. After all, if Nietzsche encourages or wants people (or exceptional ones) to pursue their own "task," then he wants them to pursue something that, in his words, is even *more* demanding than the "task" morality would have them pursue, even if it means giving up on certain goods that Nietzsche himself says he's not immune from recognizing, like the "love and gratitude" of others (GS §338). It's a worthy sacrifice, but still *a* sacrifice. In addition, as Bernard Reginster has commented, "At its core, [Nietzsche's] ethics of power is intended to reflect the value we place on what is difficult or … challenging" (2006, 177). The ethical values that Nietzsche appreciates are *demanding* ones. And, in fact, Nietzsche seems to think that this applies to ethics as a whole rather than just *his* ethics. In Zarathustra's words,

> A tablet of the good hangs over every people … it is the tablet of their overcomings …
>   Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy" (Z I: 15).[154]

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[154] Walter Kaufmann (1974, chapter 7) thought that "overcoming" is a central feature in Nietzsche's conception of ethics.

But secondly, I think that if we attend to Nietzsche's (admittedly rare) positive remarks about

morality, we'll see that it is morality's demandingness that he appreciates most. BGE §188 is

an especially instructive passage in this regard:

> Every morality is, as opposed to *laisser aller*, a bit of tyranny against "nature"; also against "reason"; but this in itself is no objection, as long as we do not have some other morality which permits us to decree that every kind of tyranny and unreason is impermissible. What is essential and inestimable in every morality is that it constitutes a long compulsion …
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> … [T]he curious fact is that all there is or has been on earth of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance, and masterly sureness, whether in though itself or in government, or in rhetoric and persuasion, in the arts just as in ethics, has developed only owing to the "tyranny of capricious laws" …
>
> … What is essential … seems to be … that there should be *obedience* over a long period of time and in a *single* direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worth while to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality—something transfiguring, subtle, mad, and divine. The long unfreedom of the spirit, the mistrustful constraint in the communicability of thoughts, the discipline thinkers imposed on themselves to think within the directions laid down by a church or court, or under Aristotelian presuppositions, the long spiritual will to interpret all events under a Christian schema and to rediscover and justify the Christian god in every accident—all this, however forced, capricious, hard, gruesome, and anti-rational has shown itself to be the means through which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility, though admittedly in the process an irreplaceable amount of strength and spirit has to be crushed, stifled, and ruined …
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> … [T]his tyranny, this caprice, this rigorous and grandiose stupidity has *educated* the spirit … Consider any morality with this in mind: what there is in it of "nature" teaches hatred of *laisser aller*, of any all-too-great freedom, and implants the need for limited horizons and the nearest tasks—teaching the *narrowing of our perspective*, and thus in a certain sense stupidity, as a condition of life and growth.[155]

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[155] This should raise some doubts or questions about Mattia Riccardi's (2021) reading. Riccardi views the "free spirit" as Nietzsche's ideal, and he contrasts it with the "fanatic," but he's not sufficiently sensitive to Nietzsche's more positive comments about the role that fanaticism plays in shaping the kinds of capacities that make free spirits possible. (Cf. BGE §189).

Nietzsche is thinking here especially of the severe demandingness of the "will to truth," or of the intellectual enterprise that forbids itself belief in lies, illusions, deceit, etc., The will to truth is the "*most recent and noblest*" manifestation of the ascetic ideal, the demanding ideal *par excellence* (GM III: §23). In this manner, the "seeker after knowledge" makes "over-severe demands" on himself (GS §107); he forces himself to "recognize things against the inclination of the spirit" and thus exercises "cruelty" against himself (BGE §229). But he does so out of a sense of "duty," *moral* duty (BGE §226).[156] As Nietzsche says in the 1886 preface to *Daybreak*, "in this book faith in morality is withdrawn … *Out of morality!* … [T]here is no doubt that a 'thou shalt' still speaks to us too, that we too still obey a stern law set over us — and this is the last moral law which can make itself audible even to us … [I]n this if in anything we too are still *men of conscience*: namely, in that we do not want to return to that which we consider outlived and decayed … be it called God, virtue, truth, justice, charity; that we do not permit ourselves any bridges-of-lies to ancient ideals" (D P: §4).[157]

This last point leads us, finally, to the crux of Nietzsche's reevaluation of moral demandingness. The work of the "free spirits" (and Nietzsche himself) have brought Western civilization, Nietzsche thinks, to the precipice of an evaluative abyss; they're the ones who are most responsible for the "death of God" (GS §357; GM III: §27). But God, or the ideal that God just *represents*—the ascetic ideal—has been the "only ideal" *humanity* has had so far, Nietzsche claims (GM III: §28). And, although the ideal increased human suffering, it still provided human beings, as we noted in Chapter 2, with a "meaning," with an answer to the

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[156] But see GS §324

[157] In *Zarathustra*, we find praise even for the very idea of the "thou shalt!", which is just a stage in self-development that must be overcome, on Nietzsche's view there. (Z I: 1).

question "why?". In doing so, the ascetic ideal rescued humanity from "suicidal nihilism." If the analysis I offered in Chapter 3 is correct, then that means the *demandingness of morality* via the ascetic ideal played a crucial role in enabling humanity to persist and, in some cases, perhaps even to flourish and develop its potentials and capacities. It 'seduced' humanity to *life*.

But that's also why the free spirits' metaphysics-destroying, unconditional-truth-seeking enterprise undertakes a serious risk, a risk they don't recognize they're undertaking. They risk opening the door again precisely to this suicidal nihilism. As Nietzsche writes in GS §346, "man is a reverent animal," and when the free spirits mock, demean, negate, and demolish those metaphysical and religious doctrines that human beings have hitherto revered and that have enabled them to "*endure* life," have they not "carried the contempt for man one step further?" After they've sacrificed God, Christianity, morality, etc. they will have to abolish themselves too; after they've completely naturalized the world, they'll be left with nothing to will but the nothingness itself (BGE §55). This condition, we have seen, is the ripe ground for the "disease of the will" (GS §347) and, hence, those pathological forms of moral demandingness we examined. It's also a precondition for something potentially more frightening: a relinquishing of humanity altogether, a return to bare animal existence, perhaps even a degraded form of animality, i.e., Zarathustra's last man. Nietzsche, I think, surely wants to avoid both of these developments.[158] That is, his wish is that we'll create *new* ideals for humanity. Yet, as MSE demonstrated, that in itself cannot be an evasion of demandingness,

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[158] See, though, Jessica Berry (2015) and Simon May (2011), who both argue, in some form, that "nihilism" qua the elimination of morality and the ascetic ideal isn't Nietzsche's worry; that he thinks we should get rid of the need for the "beyond" and a 'justification' for life altogether. But it's hard to accept this in light of Zarathustra's claim that, "if humanity still lacks a goal—is humanity itself not still lacking too? (Z I: 15).

but the most demanding "task" of all, whether we take up the Immoralist View or the refined Ordinary one.

This, of course, doesn't tell us whether each one of us should or is permitted to pursue his "own way" rather than "morality's way." But, on the interpretation I am arguing for—the *seduction interpretation*—Nietzsche wasn't trying to solve this problem for his readers or for humanity. If he provides any kind of 'moral guidance' at all, it isn't geared towards offering us a principle of action. Its aim, rather, is to *disturb*, *arouse*, *entice*, and *provoke* us into reflecting on our own first-personal relation to morality: how does it fit into our evaluative framework?[159] How committed are we to it *really*? If we're committed to it, then why aren't we moved to do more about the evils that abound? Are we just rationalizing inaction? Are we really pursuing something better, worthier, nobler than morality's ideal? What, if anything, could be worthier than that? We're not (thankfully) indifferent to the suffering of others and the injustice that's prevalent in the world, but neither are we indifferent to values and projects that may come at the *expense* of alleviating such suffering and combatting this injustice.[160] These orientations, Nietzsche is suggesting, don't fit with one another as comfortably and easily as we would wish. That is what, for Nietzsche, we haven't fully appreciated; and, once we do, it'll lead us to the *ultimate dilemma* of Chapter 1: we can avoid morality's demandingness, but only at the cost of

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[159] In this context, the following comment from Nietzsche seems apropos: "Diogenes [the Cynic] said when someone praised a philosopher in his presence: 'How could he be considered great, since has been a philosopher for so long and has never yet *disturbed* anybody?' That, indeed, ought to be the epitaph of university philosophy: 'it disturbed nobody'" (UM III: §8).

[160] Cf. Reginster 2006, who poses the following Nietzschean dilemma: "Given the choice between a world in which there are great achievements, but in which much human suffering goes unrelieved, and a world in which much or all human suffering is relieved, but few or no great achievements exist, would we choose the latter, "moral" world over the former "immoral" one?" (188). Leiter (2019b) offers a more horrifying version of this basic dilemma with his "Nietzschean trolley case."

becoming moral nihilists. Perhaps Nietzsche's greatest relevance for moral philosophy resides in forcing and staging a confrontation with this question rather than in attempting to resolve it.

4. Conclusion: Nietzsche and the Demandingness Critics

The question we are brought to now is about Nietzsche's relation to Williams and contemporary "Demandingness Critics." In Chapter 2, I claimed that the "Nietzsche-Williams schism" exists, but that it's more complicated than Leiter (2019a) presents it. In this concluding section, I would like to make good on that promise. The schism, as Leiter sees it, rides on his elitist interpretation of Nietzsche: Nietzsche's problem with demandingness is that it thwarts the "higher types," and Williams combats demandingness in the name of bourgeois values. How accurate is that?

In his Postscript to *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams discusses a set of "optimistic beliefs" that undegird the book. The third (and last) of these beliefs, Williams says, is "in the continuing possibility of a meaningful individual life, one that does not reject society, and indeed shares its perceptions with other people to a considerable depth, but is enough unlike others in its opacities and disorder as well as in its reasoned intentions, to make it *somebody's*" (ELP 201-2). The concern with the demandingness of moral obligation echoes here insofar as Williams takes it to be something that threatens the possibility for such a life. It is tempting, then, to see Williams' criticism of moral demandingness as bottoming out in a liberal-democratic commitment to "individualism." Is this a commitment that he shares with Nietzsche?

Nietzsche's reputation in the Anglo-American world was rehabilitated from its National Socialist taints thanks to Walter Kaufmann's herculean efforts in the 1950's-1970's. Kaufmann rescued Nietzsche from the Nazi blot by interpreting him in a much more palatable way, i.e., as a European humanist concerned with the flourishing of individuality and its liberation from traditional sources of authority: religion, politics, public opinion, etc. Although Kaufmann has probably rightly been accused of 'domesticating' Nietzsche because he overlooked Nietzsche's undoubtedly less palatable claims—e.g., his racist, sexist, eugenicist, and elitist remarks—there still seems to be something correct about Kaufmann's emphasis. Indeed, if we consider why the creation of "new ideals" should matter to Nietzsche, a plausible answer seems to be this: ideals give meaning to the lives of individuals. In Nietzsche's view, they're intimately connected with the kind of life *human* beings live and the realization of the variety of goods that compose human lives; the whole domain of culture is animated by the 'spirit' of our ideals. In ELP, Williams doesn't focus his discussion on morality's "ideal," but it is a major concern that's operating in the background. Only towards the end of ELP do we come face-to-face with this shadow that has been hovering over the whole book. The "important" thing about the morality system, Williams says there, is its "spirit." And the spirit of morality is *purity*. Morality segregates values—or the highest values—from the muck and mire of ordinary, messy, human, all-too-human existence. It is a rejection, as Nietzsche says, of that whole "sphere of becoming and transitoriness" we otherwise call "nature," "world," or "existence" (GM III: §11). Therefore, there's ground for drawing a substantive connection between Nietzsche and Williams. They're both worried about the possibility of a meaningful life for individuals; and they both think that morality's demandingness poses a threat to that end. So, *pace* Leiter, Williams and Nietzsche's aren't far apart in this respect.

But there's more. There's another dimension that introduces a more interesting schism. Nietzsche, I think, elucidates something that Williams typically does not: his genealogy of morality explains how *morality* itself managed to provide a meaningful life to individuals. This thread is largely missing in Williams and the work of the Demandingness Critics in general. For instance, in reading Wolf's "Moral Saints" (1982) it's difficult to see how anyone could've ever found the idea of the "saint" seductive at all. The difference between the Demandingness Critics and Nietzsche emerges most starkly via the theme of the "death of God." For Nietzsche, the death of God is a monumental event—but also an immensely frightening one. The death of God is just the death of morality; it's the death of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche, we're often told, is an opponent of the ascetic ideal. Yet, as our discussion suggests, GM III shows how much genuine *value* the ascetic ideal has afforded. Principally, the ascetic ideal prevented humanity from falling into "suicidal nihilism." This ideal, which seems *essentially* opposed to life (anti-life) is in fact one of the greatest and most "life-affirming," "*yes-creating*" forces (GM III: §13). This ideal has been so integral in shaping us that it is almost inextricably intertwined with the very meaning of being human. Thus, Nietzsche says, whenever we attack the ascetic ideal and the creations that have emanated from it ideal—religion, morality, philosophy, etc.—we are, in a sense, attacking our own human identity (GS §346).

Williams, I am suggesting, adopts Nietzsche's worries about moral demandingness in the name of individualistic meaningfulness, but he doesn't sufficiently appreciate Nietzsche's worries concerning the very possibility of meaningfulness *without* moral demandingness. Why is this? Here's one tempting Nietzschean answer: morality and the ascetic ideal are already mostly dead, so the demise of morality doesn't appear to contemporary critics as a *loss* at all. Indeed, what's so interesting about Nietzsche's MSE is that it can reveal to readers how little

they might actually be attached to the moral principles they profess. The demise of morality doesn't mean the demise of ethics, as I hope is clear, nor the demise of obligation. Nietzsche, we saw in Chapter 3, claims that communal life as such depends on certain "presuppositions" that correspond to basic ethical obligations, e.g., refraining from mutual injury, obeying the community's laws, etc. (GM II: §3). There is no reason to assume that Nietzsche would have been especially opposed to those kinds of basic ethical obligations (cf. D §103). Williams, Anscombe, etc. likewise all agree there is an "ordinary" and uncomplicated notion of obligation that can and will continue to operate in ordinary ethical life, and poses no serious philosophical problems or objections. Nietzsche and the contemporary critics all recognize the importance of "morality" in this sense. They disagree about the significance of the demise of morality as a *demanding* form of ethical life. If morality no longer commands our allegiance in this respect, then what should come in its place? One possibility, of course, is that *nothing* should come in its place. Or perhaps that everyone should be free to command themselves. This, generally, is roughly the answer liberalism offers. You're left to form your own conception of the Good (Rawls 1971). In practice, however, this is often accompanied by the hollowing out of value. Maudemarie Clark puts this point well,

> In a democracy, I take Nietzsche to be claiming, standards for success become common or democratic, as those of American society certainly are now: Just about everyone can have some of what constitutes success. In alphabetical order: fame, money, pleasure, power, sex. The successful just have more of it. And we have little shared idea of excellence beyond such success. This point was brought home to me once by an interview I saw with someone who had succeeded in amassing a large fortune at a very early age. When asked what had motivated him to work so hard to make money, he replied, in what struck me as all sincerity and innocence, that he had always been driven by a passion- ate desire to achieve excellence. It seemed that it had simply never occurred to him that there could be any measure of excellence or success other than money (2015, 117).

It is very tempting to say that this devaluation of value is just the late-late stage in the unraveling of the ascetic ideal; it expresses, after all, a kind of "will to nothingness" insofar as currency is not a substantive good at all. Indeed, I want to suggest that if such a will were ever successful in realizing its 'ideal,' then it would cancel itself out—instead of a *will* to nothingness we'll be left, purely and simply, with *nothingness*; not the *last* man, but *no* man. And I mean this quite literally with respect to human life. This prospect becomes increasingly real and frightful with the onset of the impending environmental catastrophe, which Nietzsche didn't (alas) envision. In the popular imagination, capitalism commonly evokes associations with greed, profiteering, materialism, etc., i.e., all those instincts and drives that morality supposedly condemns. But, in spirit, I think it is interpretable as the very last gasp of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche heralds this in some of his comments, e.g., when he says that late-modern "educational institutions" present the "accumulation of the greatest possible amount of happiness and profit" as a "*moral* necessity" (UM III: §6). The German sociologist Max Weber—under the influence of Nietzsche Marx—was the first to articulate this connection systematically. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber writes that capitalism is "identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever *renewed* profit," but that, "in spirit," it "*may* be identical with restraint … of this irrational impulse" (1905, 17). The capitalist spirit is the product of the *ascetic ethos* of Calvinism; at its core, it is "turned with all its force against one thing: the spontaneous enjoyment of life and all it had to offer" (166). It transforms the activity of profit-seeking into the human being's "duty," "obligation," the "*calling*" that *ought* to systematically structure his whole life (54). Yet man isn't commanded to maximize profit for his enjoyment or his use. Rather, the accumulation serves as a mere sign of one's predestined salvation, that one is a member of God's "elect." The calling manifests itself in "systematic

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self-control which at every moment stands before the inexorable alternative, chosen or damned" (115). The "God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system" (117). Thus, under capitalism,

> the real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, and above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous [profit-maximizing] life … Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins (157).

Weber shows that morality's *demandingness* doesn't disappear with capitalism either. The association with luxury, indulgence, hedonism, etc. is a veneer for asceticism; another means to *escape* from the self (GS §338). Instead of sacrificing himself to God, man sacrifices himself to property—nothingness by another name.

Whatever meaning and progress capitalism managed to secure in human history, it is now destroying the very possibility of organized human life itself. Ironically, then, this materialist, secular ethos that dominates human life and its social institutions is, in a very literal sense, a life-denying, world-negating force. Nietzsche would have appreciated this irony: just as morality's ostensibly life-denying ascetic ideal turns out to be paradoxically life-affirming, the ostensibly life-affirming ideal of capitalism turns out to be the paradoxical epitome of life-denial. But, perhaps more ironically, it is that 'life-denying' ascetic morality, the morality of "compassion," "altruism," "selflessness," "beneficence," "equality," "rights," etc. that seems to represent the counterforce against the literal nothingness that capitalism is hurtling us towards. The demandingness of morality, in this respect, seems more relevant than ever if we're to avoid the nothingness. Thus, today it is morality that again represents the most "life-affirming" drive. In confronting Nietzsche's reevaluation of moral demandingness, we're forced to ask

ourselves: What is it in us that rebels against morality's demands? Are we opposed to its *demandingness* or are we opposed to what is actually being *demanded*? Is there something that's worth devoting our lives to more than morality, or do we simply want to escape demands altogether? Nietzsche's aim isn't, I think, to answer these questions for us. It is, rather, to bring us to a position where we can appreciate the question itself. This is something he shares with Williams too, I think. Williams was keener on demonstrating the problems that morality *obscures* rather than solving those problems, if he even thought they were solvable at all. The difference is that Nietzsche demonstrates greater sensitivity—and wants his readers to appreciate—that which is at stake of being *lost* when we cross the threshold to immoralism.

Appendix I: Antiracism and Moral Demandingness

Nietzsche's conception of moral demandingness in terms of the ascetic ideal provides a brilliant framework for unveiling those cultural nooks where moral demandingness still rears its head. In this Appendix, I offer a Nietzschean analysis of the modern 'antiracism movement' as a case study of this.

The contemporary 'antiracism movement' is a movement in a loose sense alone. It is not organized, it doesn't engage in collective action, and it is led by a cadre of academics and professionals who mostly provide diversity training for businesses, universities, NGOs, etc. Perhaps the most prominent antiracist theorist is Robin DiAngelo. Her book *White Fragility* (2018) was a *New York Times* Bestseller for over a year after its publication date. DiAngelo's central thesis is that "Socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority that we [white people] either are unaware of or can never admit to ourselves, we become highly fragile in conversations about race. We consider a challenge to our racial worldviews a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people" (22). Although DiAngelo is talking about white people in general, it's crucial to note that she's not addressing all of them. The target, rather, are those "white progressives" who already *oppose* racism, who already recognize racism's systemic nature, who already believe themselves to be on the 'right side of history,' who voted for Obama, etc. These are the people who are "fragile"—i.e., who become upset, angry, defensive, avoidant—when they are told that they're in fact not 'anti-racist' at all. Far from it, they're part of the problem. DiAngelo writes that, "*white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color*" (25). If that's true, then this should be really shocking for anyone who takes herself to be opposed to racism. To hear that *you* are an active, contributing participant in a white

supremacist culture isn't a comfortable message for people who think that racism is evil and that racists are abhorrent.[161] If racists are bad, then *I* am bad. I am sure that DiAngelo has uncovered a genuine phenomenon[162], but I won't be focusing on the empirical validity of her claims. First, I am only interested in excavating the philosophical picture that orients and animates her work; and I will suggest that this picture fits Nietzsche's diagnosis of ascetic-moral demandingness.

Although DiAngelo understands racism as "systemic," i.e., as a phenomenon constituted and maintained by "norms, structures, and institutions" (136) rather than one that is grounded in the psychology of individuals, her whole book is concerned with 'white psychology.' She offers a psychological diagnosis of the problem—white people are resistant to facing difficult truths about their own racial biases and their investment in white supremacy—and then offers cognitive-behavioral remedies, e.g., white folks should attempt to internalize assumptions such as, "Racism cannot be avoided" and "authentic antiracism is rarely comfortable … Discomfort is key to my growth and thus desirable," which will, in turn, lead white people to "Stretch our worldviews," "Interrupt internalized superiority," "Ensure action," etc. (143). DiAngelo presents antiracism primarily as a project of private psychological reform. The core *moral* message of *White Fragility* is that this reform is something that white people are morally obligated to strive to achieve; antiracism is an obligatory end. As DiAngelo says, "Now it is our responsibility to grapple with how this socialization manifests itself in our daily lives and how it shapes our responses when it is challenged" (82). This is the first

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[161] DiAngelo provides no evidence that white progressives cause the most "daily damage."

[162] It's a defense mechanism that Freud had already identified. For an interesting account of 'white fragility' in the classroom setting, see bell hooks (1994).

component of DiAngelo's philosophical picture. Let's call it the *demand component*. But there's another.

The second component is that, as it turns out, it is *impossible* to fully satisfy the obligatory end of antiracism. Why not? I discern several arguments. First, DiAngelo emphasizes the role that socialization plays in shaping and forming the attitudes, perspectives, experiences, etc. that "virtually all white people in the Western context and the US context specifically" have (66). This context is dominated by white supremacist culture; and that's what shapes white people's psychology. Second, DiAngelo says that all white people benefit from white privilege. They often benefit directly by getting access to certain good that their non-white counterparts are unfairly excluded from, but they also benefit indirectly by being spared from the active *harms* that plague the lives of their non-white counterparts, e.g., harassment by law enforcement (42). Their lives have been indelibly built upon the subjugation of others. There's of course an incentive to maintain such a system, at least subconsciously. That's one explanation for the ubiquity of white fragility; it halts or prevents discussion that could either point out the difficult reality about the unfair and largely invisible (to whites) benefits that white people receive and their complicity in maintaining, and hence it also stops white people from *doing* anything about it.

But neither the argument from cultural determinism nor the argument from privilege demonstrate that it is *impossible* to be antiracist. Surely, it's difficult work; but why think it is impossible? A third argument provides some illumination, I think. This argument relies on what it means to *be* "white;" white identity itself. DiAngelo claims that "anti-blackness is foundational to our very identities as white people. Whiteness has always been predicated on blackness" (99). To identify as white is therefore to already be *essentially* anti-black. Anti-

blackness is the very essence of whiteness. For this reason, reforming white identity in an anti-racist manner is an "impossible goal," DiAngelo says (148). "Rather," she continues,

> I strive to be "less white." To be less white is to be less racially oppressive. This requires me to be more racially aware, to be better educated about racism, and to continually challenge racial certitude and arrogance. To be less white is to be open to, interested in, and compassionate toward the racial realities of people of color. (149).

The reason the antiracist obligation is impossible to fulfill completely is because it would require the *abolition of whiteness itself*. This, of course, is as impossible as reforming white identity in antiracist terms.[163] The antiracist obligation is thus impossible to fulfill—the white progressive can only hope to become increasingly "less white." To the question of whether younger generations of white people are any less racist—that is, less white—than their parents, DiAngelo answers decisively in the negative. "In some ways," she says, "racism's adaptations over time are more sinister than concrete rules such as Jim Crow" (64). The white progressive hasn't, then, even moved much farther than her segregationist elders. Can she ever be reformed? Perhaps, but to achieve full moral reformation, she'd need to imagine an eternity of progress that could finally culminate only in the complete abolition of her (white) self. Call this the *impossibility* component.

So, we have here a moral demand that is impossible to satisfy. It's an obligatory project for a lifetime. Presented in this manner, it's surely a case of moral demandingness. But Nietzsche's framework allows us to delve much deeper. As we saw, moral demandingness arises, for Nietzsche, not just from the obligatory nature of morality but from its content as well. We're obligated to renounce our nature. In DiAngelo, "nature" has been transformed

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[163] This is implied, I think, but not stated by DiAngelo.

into "whiteness." The corresponding moral obligation to abolish one's nature is now a moral obligation to abolish one's whiteness. In both cases, we're faced with an impossible demand. Everything the "white progressive" does leaves behind an *immoral* remainder of her own whiteness.[164] Here conscience will always repeat, "Your work is not yet done; you *know* there's still a racist inside you; it must be monitored, combatted, suppressed, extinguished, criticized, condemned, beaten, strangled." This is, therefore, a case of severe moral demandingness that engenders unlimited opportunities for guilt, self-critique, self-laceration, self-punishment; but also fear, horror, despair, etc. These are essentially the tactics of Nietzsche's priest:

> The principle bow stroke of the ascetic priest allowed himself in order to cause the human soul to resound with wrenching and ecstatic music of every kind was executed— everyone knows this—by exploiting the *feeling of guilt* … Man, suffering from himself in some way or other … somewhat like an animal locked in a cage, uncertain why, to what end? desirous of reasons—reasons alleviate—desirous also of cures and narcotics, finally holds counsel with one who also knows concealed things—and behold! he receives a hint; from his magician, the ascetic priest, he receives the *first* hint concerning the "cause" of his suffering: he is to seek it in *himself*, in a *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he is to understand his suffering itself as a *state of punishment* … [E]verywhere bad conscience … the reinterpretation of suffering into feelings of guilt, fear, and punishment; everywhere the whip, the hairshirt, the starving body, contrition; everywhere the sinner breaking himself on the cruel wheels of a restless, diseased-lascivious conscience (GM III: §20).

DiAngelo claims not to endorse "guilt" as a response to one's racism (148). She claims that guilt isn't a helpful emotion for dealing with racism but, rather, part of the white fragility syndrome itself. Yet it's hard to understand how guilt (and shame) are truly avoidable once the intended audience is presented with *White Fragility*'s philosophical picture. It's a masterful framework for punishing oneself *and* for punishing others. The mere denial of one's racism is

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[164] The idea of a "moral remainder" comes from Williams (1981).

now *proof* of one's racism, of one's commitment to white supremacy. What are the white progressives to do, then? All that's left is to *confess* their sins; to "dig around after dark questionable stories in the viscera of their past and present, where they are free to wallow in a tormenting suspicion … —they tear open the oldest wounds, they bleed to death from scars long healed" (GM III: §15). The affinities with Nietzsche's account go deeper still. The "bad conscience" infects the conception we have of the "ancestors" (gods). E.g., Adam becomes the source of original sin and the fallenness of humankind. Similarly, the ancestors—Founding Fathers, Columbus, etc. (in the US context)—become *the* original sinners. The whole foundation is rotten and infected with the blot of original whiteness; ironically, the black mark that stains the Western soul was whiteness all along.

From the Nietzschean perspective, DiAngelo emerges as the incarnation of a uniquely modern, Twenty-First Century ascetic priestess. None of this implies, though, that DiAngelo is fundamentally incorrect in her observations or views. Here I am only attempting to demonstrate how Nietzsche's account enables us to uncover the 'hideouts' of moral demandingness / the ascetic ideal in contemporary culture. It is enough if the Nietzschean analysis of *White Fragility* is a culturally intelligible one, that is, if it maps onto a recognizable script of contemporary cultural discourse. The Nietzschean analysis vindicates Williams' concern with moral demandingness as a serious concern in 20th and 21st Century moral culture. Still, it is tempting to consider whether the analysis also underlies a Nietzschean *critique*. Briefly, here's how such a critique might proceed. First, the ostensible goal of antiracism is, of course, to combat racism. Does *White Fragility* help with that goal? Nietzsche raises the same essential question in relation to morality: does it alleviate the 'illness' it's supposed to cure? His answer, of course, is that it does not. The problem, in part, is one's injured self-conception—the feeling

that one is impotent and worthless. The reevaluation of values is meant to rehabilitate one's image; but, as we saw, there's the corollary need to express one's aggressive drives. *Guilt* offers a solution to both; in feeling guilty I can both rehabilitate my self-conception *through* the expression of my aggressive drives. The paradox, though, is that I judge myself "good" only insofar as I judge myself to be "evil;" I atone for my corrupt, sinful nature by punishing myself with guilt. In confessing my immorality, I restore my worthiness as a human being in the eyes of God. The *confessional pathology*—as I called it in Chapter 4—is built into the philosophical picture of *White Fragility*. It's only by continuing to *be* racist—and to profess her racism—that the white progressive can aspire towards fulfilling the moral demand of becoming a genuine *antiracist*. Perhaps the most disconcerting element of this, though, is how utterly pointless this kind of confessional practice seems; how concerned it is with the *purity* of one's own soul rather than with doing anything that's in fact helpful to non-white persons.[165] If racism is 'structural,' as DiAngelo claims, it would make more sense to focus on how we can dismantle racist structures instead of engaging in the racialized conscience-vivisection of DiAngelo's confessional booth.

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[165] In this regard, see especially Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger" (1981).

Appendix II: Nietzsche's Early Objections to Moral Demandingness

Nietzsche's first sustained, critical engagement with moral demandingness appears in his "middle period" works, especially the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* (1876). Previously, we saw Nietzsche's interest in the demandingness of Christian morality, e.g., in comments like: "Go through the moral demands exhibited in the documents of Christianity one by one and you will find that in every case they are exaggerated, so that man *could* not live up to them; the intention is not that he should *become* more moral, but he should feel *as sinful as possible"* (HH I: §141). Although Nietzsche's tone is critical, it's unclear what his critique *is*. The crucial critique(s) he raises against moral demandingness in HH, I'll argue, are *metaethical*. They aim at undercutting the *status* of moral demandingness—or demonstrating that it rests on unstable metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions. Nietzsche reasoned that if the foundations are bad, then the values are bad too.

It is clear from the context (HH I: §132-144) that he has Christian asceticism and the moral demand for selflessness principally in mind. The greatest source of the feeling of sinfulness for the Christian, he claims, results from their despair at the possibility of living in a Godlike or selfless manner: the inevitable, constant violation of the Christian command of "love." It is in this context that we find Nietzsche's earliest (developed) objections to moral demandingness.

The most crucial passage in this respect is HH I: §133. Here Nietzsche discusses several "errors" he thinks Christianity makes in its formulation of the demand for selflessness. He claims that it is ridiculous to suppose we can even imagine a being (God) who is capable of nothing but unegoistic actions. Using La Rochefoucauld's analysis of love, he says that a

being who's "wholly love" wouldn't be able to act unegoistically because love always only aims at the pleasant sensations the beloved object produces in the lover. Following Paul Reé, Nietzsche argues that we praise actions that are done out of love more highly simply because of their utility or prudential value. But these arguments seem to depend on a thesis that Nietzsche abandoned in his later work, viz., psychological egoism, the view that all human actions is ultimately motivated by self-interest as a matter of psychological fact.[166] Nietzsche seems to have rejected this view by the time he wrote *Daybreak*.[167] However, two arguments that Nietzsche offers in HH I: §133 are not straightforwardly dependent on the assumption of psychological egoism. These arguments are worth discussing in more detail. They're both contained in the following remarks:

> If … a man should wish to be, like that God, wholly love, and to do and desire everything for others and nothing for himself, then the latter is impossible simply because he has to do a *great deal* for himself if he is to be able to anything whatever for the sake of others. Moreover, such a thing presupposes that the other is sufficiently egoistical to accept this sacrifice, this life lived for his sake, over and over again: so that men of love and self-sacrifice would have to have an interest in the continuance of the loveless egoist incapable of self-sacrifice, and the highest morality would, if it was to continue to exist, have to downright *compel* the existence of immorality (whereby it would, to be sure, abolish itself).

The first argument—call it the *practical impossibility argument*—can be reformulated roughly as follows:

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[166] Reginster (2000, 181).

[167] But see Elgat (2015), who argues that Nietzsche was *not* a psychological egoist even when he wrote HH. Instead, Elgat claims, Nietzsche wanted to refute Schopenhauer's view that purely altruistic actions, i.e., actions that are done "exclusively out of other-regarding motivations" (309), are possible. This means that some actions, on Nietzsche's view, can be "mixed" in that they involve both egoistic and other-regarding motivations. Elgat points to passages like HH I: §49 and §57, for instance, for textual support.

1) Absolute altruism ("love") consists in 'doing and desiring' *only* the good of others, never one's own good alone
2) But, to 'do and desire' *anything* at all for another, one must 'do and desire' many things for oneself, e.g., one must desire being able-bodied and of sound mind to do almost any good to others
3) Therefore, absolute altruism is a practical impossibility: to *act* as an absolute altruist, one must *not* act as one.

In other words, absolute altruism is practically self-refuting. Perhaps this argument be fruitfully compared with Aristotle's discussion of the relation between happiness (*eudaimonia*) and virtue in Book I of *Nichomachean Ethics*. Although the life of virtuous activity *is* the happy life, Aristotle says, "Nevertheless happiness evidently also needs some external goods to be added <to the activity> … since we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources" (1099a). I cannot practice generosity, for instance, if I don't have anything to be generous *with* or anyone to be generous *to*. A completely propertyless, destitute individual is as practically incapable of generosity; but then so is an extravagantly wealthy person stranded on a desert island. It is true, of course, that one typically can be generous with whatever one does have, even if one has very little—but that's exactly Nietzsche's point. In order to *give*, one must first *possess*; and total altruism is incompatible with having anything at all. It is, therefore, a self-refuting demand. The literal practice of this ethical prescription requires the violation of the prescription itself. I cannot live up to the absolute altruistic demand unless I am *not* absolutely altruistic. This is the practical sense in which the absolute demand is self-refuting.

The second argument isn't about the conditions of possibility of absolute altruism. It is, rather, best interpreted as an attempt at demonstrating how absolute altruism qua moral maxim generates a contradiction, and therefore cannot stand as a *moral* demand. I call it the *double-standard argument*. Here's my formulation:

1) If absolute altruism is a genuine (binding) moral demand, then one *ought* to only 'do and desire' the good of others, never one's own good alone
2) But, to 'do and desire' anything for another requires assuming that they are *permitted* to accept the benefit one confers on them
3) And (2) assumes that the recipient of altruism isn't morally obligated to be an absolute altruist herself, i.e., it implies—via (1)—that the other is permitted to act *immorally*[168]
4) Therefore, absolute altruism cannot be a genuine moral demand; for it would demand its own violation.

The argument suggests that, if absolute altruism is endorsed as a moral principle, then it results in a "contradiction in conception," as Kant calls it. Altruism, in general, presupposes that people have certain self-regarding interests that it is permissible to respect or promote. But, if that's correct, I cannot demand that everyone abide by the demand for absolute altruism because then nobody would accept any benefits to themselves, and thus altruism itself will become pointless. The absolute altruist must therefore will the existence of "loveless egoists," if she's to continue *being* an absolute altruist herself—in other words, she's upholding a rule she couldn't will that everyone else uphold as well. Absolute altruism can't, then, be an unconditional *moral* demand for all humanity to follow. If it were, it would "abolish" itself.[169]

We have here two early Nietzschean arguments against moral demandingness, then. How good are they? Let's first examine the *practical impossibility argument*. Although Nietzsche is of course correct to claim that 'giving' requires 'having,' that surely doesn't imply absolute altruism is a practical impossibility. Rather, it merely points out a *condition* for the demand's

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[168] Williams comments, "As Nietzsche constantly reminds us, morality owes a great deal, including its own existence to the fact it is not obeyed; it can seem to achieve closure on its own absolute kind of value only because the space it operates is created, historically, socially, and psychologically, by kinds of impulse that it rejects" (1995, 245).

[169] Nietzsche seems to suggest in *Daybreak* that Christianity appeared as supremely selfish, however, because it was so concerned with personal salvation (D §9).

fulfillment. It is perfectly easy to imagine someone who acquires certain goods—skills, wealth, knowledge, and so on—*only* for the *sake* of promoting the good of others rather than her own. True, such a person may be concerned with her own welfare too, but only in a secondary or proximal manner; she'd be concerned with it insofar as such a concern is necessary for meeting their altruistic goals. To 'desire and do' things for oneself is therefore not incompatible with absolute altruism.

What about the *double-standard argument*? It seems correct that one couldn't rationally *will* everyone act as an absolute altruist. There must be someone who's willing to accept a personal benefit, if there's to be any reason to engage in altruistic behavior at all. As Nietzsche pithily puts it elsewhere, "if both [romantic] partners felt impelled by love to renounce themselves, we should then get—I do not know what; perhaps an empty space?" (GS §363). For someone to be able and willing to give, the other must be able and willing to take. There's a commonsense intuition underlying Nietzsche's argument that seems intractable: we can't really expect everyone to *never* consider their own welfare and interests; that would make the thought of 'doing good' to others unintelligible. What's the point of doing good to anyone, if we think they themselves shouldn't be concerned with their own welfare? And why should we care about their good, if we believe *they* shouldn't care about it either? (cf. WLN, 197). But although this thought is compelling, it's not sufficient for us to conclude that one ought not to try to be an absolute altruist, if we're first entitled to assume that, as a matter of fact, most people won't be acting very altruistically at all. Under the assumption of *non-ideal* conditions, the moral demand for absolute altruism still has some resonance. This view is broadly open for consequentialists, for instance. If 'the good' would be maximized by *my* acting as an absolute altruist, then *I* ought to act as an absolute altruist, whatever other people might (or

ought to) do. Christianity itself seems to assume non-ideal conditions—we're "fallen" creatures, after all. That is why morality's demands can be pitched at such a high level. They operate on the assumption that most of us *won't* fulfill those demands; they don't rely on considering what would happen if most of us *did* fulfill them.

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